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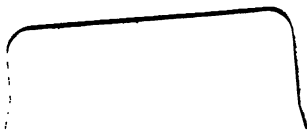
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THE HEIRESS OF VERNON HALL.

THE
HEIRESS OF VERNON HALL.

In Autobiography.

W. H. W.

O, how this spring of Love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away.

SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1858.

249. w. 630.



1807

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF



1807

THE HEIRESS OF VERNON HALL.

CHAPTER I.

ON a beautiful May morning, beneath the shade of a cluster of oaks in a noble and wide-spreading park, I was strolling with my father, Sir Henry Vernon.

"Caroline," he said to me, as we paused for a few minutes, "shut your book, dearest, and listen to me."

I instantly closed the volume which had been engrossing my whole attention, and looked up at my father.

"Caroline," he continued, as he laid his thin white hand fondly upon my shoulder, "from a letter which I have received this morning, I have reason to believe that your aunt Agnes cannot last beyond a few days at the farthest. Her only child will then be an orphan, unprotected, and almost destitute."

Here he stopped, as if expecting that I should make some reply; but I remained silent, and he proceeded.

"My dear girl," he said, speaking with evident hesitation and embarrassment, "I should wish, if you have no objection, to invite your young cousin Agnes to come and spend some time with us at the Hall—in short, to receive her as an inmate in our family."

At this proposal I started, and the colour glowed in my cheek, as I said,

"Dearest papa, you cannot be in earnest. You are taxing my credulity. Give Agnes Bray any sum of money, or make her any allowance, however handsome; but you cannot possibly intend that the daughter of the country apothecary should live as a sister with the only child of Sir Henry Vernon! Who has ever felt half so bitterly as yourself my aunt's self-degradation in allying herself so far

beneath her? And what could one expect of the offspring of such a marriage, but that the child should resemble the father, and be utterly unfitted for the station in which you propose to place her?"

This was spoken in my proudest tones, seldom employed towards the father whom I almost idolized. He replied more earnestly than was his wont, putting Mr. Arnold's letter into my hands, and saying—"Read this, dearest, before you express yourself quite so strongly."

It was as follows :—

"— STREET, GLOUCESTER, *May* —, 18—.

"SIR—It is with real grief and concern I write to inform you, that your sister, Mrs. Bray, who has been gradually declining since the death of her husband six months ago, is now quite given up by her medical attendant. She has long been fully persuaded that she was not destined to see the spring of another year; but not knowing how rapidly her end was approaching, she has delayed writing to you until it is no longer in her power to do so. Her silence has, I believe, left you in total ignorance of the lamentable state of poverty to which she is reduced. For several years previous to her husband's death, their difficulties had been gradually increasing, owing to his failing health, and consequently failing practice; and at his decease a very small sum was all that was found for the future maintenance of his widow and child. Unpaid debts, of which Mrs. Bray knew nothing, and her subsequent illness, have well-nigh exhausted this scanty pittance; and, on her deathbed, she implores you, through me, by the remembrance of early affection, and by the claims of that relationship which nothing short of *real* disgrace on her part could have annulled, to see her once more;—or, should you refuse to comply with this entreaty, to become the protector of her only child. This young girl, who is scarcely seventeen (the age I understand of your own daughter), has been the constant attendant of her mother during her most lingering and painful illness; and by night and by day has Agnes been at her post, till I have shuddered to look upon the ravages already produced by care and watching on her slight and delicate frame. Sir, you have indeed allowed too long a time to elapse without inquiring into the fate of those so closely connected with you; and I

adjure you, by every feeling of duty and humanity, not to allow your poor suffering sister to perish without one kind word from you, or one soothing assurance that you will not forget her orphan child.

"I will no longer trespass on your time ; but, in conclusion, I trust you will forgive me for reminding you that He who is kind to the unthankful and to the evil, will not readily acquit a brother for deserting, in her hour of utmost need, a sister who, through long years of neglect and scorn, has yet preserved unimpaired her youthful love for him, and has never given utterance to one unkind or revengeful thought.

"I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient humble servant,

"GEORGE ARNOLD,
"Minister of St. — Church, Gloucester."

My father anxiously watched my face while I was reading this communication ; but, though not wholly untouched by it, my ever-prevailing feeling of pride triumphed after a short struggle over the softer one of compassion, which had been excited within me. I returned the letter to my father, merely saying, rather coldly—

"Of course you must do as you please, papa. Should the poor girl prove unladylike, as her birth and education render but too probable, it will be a dreadful annoyance to us both."

"Caroline," he said, in a voice which he vainly endeavoured to command, "she is the child of my only sister, for whom my love once was only second to that which I now feel for you. You will be kind to Agnes for my sake, darling, will you not?"

"I have never yet disobeyed you, papa, and for your sake I would do any thing," was my reply ; and we strolled quietly back in silence to the house, the mid-day heat becoming oppressive.

I passed quickly by my mother, who was lying on a sofa near the open window of her own sitting-room, she having been of late years an almost constant invalid ; and, heedless of some commonplace question which she addressed to me in her usual quiet voice, I sought the solitude of my own chamber, there to ponder on the unwelcome intelligence I had just received.

I was not without warm and generous feelings ; but to the petted and pampered heiress of Vernon Hall, the idea of any girl becoming an inmate of her father's house was far from pleasing ; and when this proposed inmate was a relation, of whose existence I would fain have been unconscious, and whose name had never been mentioned among us, the project appeared to me all but intolerable. Neither could I then understand the motives which had induced my father to contemplate such a measure, for he had always been particular to excess in the choice of associates for me ; so much so, that I had grown up almost without being intimately acquainted with any young persons of my own age. This absence of all youthful society, together with the maxims constantly inculcated by my father, had so fostered and deepened the pride but too natural to me, that it was promising to eclipse and swallow up every good and kind impulse of my nature. Not that I despised Agnes Bray on account of her poverty ; for, had her sire been of gentle blood, it would have mattered little in my eyes whether his orphan girl had been penniless, or an heiress, like myself, of a goodly heritage ; but the stigma of low birth in my own family was to me most galling. Perhaps I was not quite without excuse ; for my father had himself been almost my sole instructor, and had formed my mind no less than he had directed my studies.

He was at this time past fifty ; pale, thoughtful, and even melancholy-looking, with dark hair and eyes, and with that nameless air of high birth and high breeding, which is the characteristic of the true English gentleman, in his case the descendant of a long line of time-honoured ancestors. To this he added the graces of an accomplished man and an elegant scholar. He was by nature cold and reserved in the extreme ; and though respected by many, and feared by more, there was perhaps only myself in the world who really loved him. In his early youth he had been deeply attached to his sister, who had returned his affection with equal ardour ; but in his absence her home had been rendered miserable by the tyranny of her stepmother ; and when, after a year of incessant persecution, she had eloped with the newly-established village apothecary, my father's feelings of madness may be better imagined than described. She, in her turn, resented her brother's scorn of a husband to whom she was

devotedly attached ; and since her marriage there had been a total estrangement between them. This had prevented my father from being aware of the state of poverty to which Mr. and Mrs. Bray had in a very short time been reduced : partly from his having been compelled to quit the village of Leyton, near Vernon Hall, and locate himself in a strange place, with scarcely a single introduction ; and partly from his failing health, which had gradually lost him even his small practice. To my aunt, who, till her father's second marriage, had never had a wish ungratified, and who had been cradled in the lap of grandeur and luxury, these trials were bitter indeed ; but she bore them nobly, without murmur or complaint, and trained her young daughter so to bear them likewise. Neither did she sit down in idle submission, but struggled with her adverse fate, and with her own hands performed many servile offices which, a few years before, she and all others would have deemed impossible to fall to the lot of Miss Vernon. Not for worlds would Mr. Bray have suffered his wife to appeal to her brother, who had soon after their union succeeded to the title and estates, for he too had his share of pride ; and while yet she clung to the memory of early days, and could scarcely bring herself to believe that the time had really arrived when her brother looked coldly upon her, she was nevertheless as reluctant as her husband to apply to him for aid. But on her death-bed, when all she could leave to her daughter was fifty pounds and her blessing, she had no alternative but to commend her to the care of the only relation who was able to befriend her. I have since become acquainted with all these particulars ; but at the time of my father's summons to Gloucester, I knew only that my aunt had married one beneath her, and the contents of Mr. Arnold's letter.

I will now say a few words respecting my mother, as they will be necessary to explain some after parts in this history.

She was the only child and heiress of a gentleman who had, shortly after my father's accession to the baronetcy, purchased a very extensive estate in an adjoining county, his father having been a most eminent and successful merchant. The connection was not altogether what Sir Henry Vernon would have chosen ; but the extravagance of his more recent ancestors had considerably impoverished his inheritance, and the broad lands and great riches of which Miss

Harding was to be the sole possessor, would enable him to rebuild that inheritance in all its former splendour. Mr. Harding, too, was a gentleman in manners and education ; and his daughter, as I now firmly believe, loved her affianced husband as much as his cold and haughty reserve would allow her to do. They were married ; and from that day till the time of which I am writing, my mother had known little real happiness. She was naturally silent, and of a shy and timid disposition, and requiring great encouragement to induce, or rather enable, her to show any thing like warmth of feeling, in which for so many years I considered her as entirely deficient. Her husband had never treated her with either affection or confidence, and she had gradually shrunk more and more into herself. Not that my father was capable of ill-using his wife—he had too much high and gentlemanly feeling ; and my mother had not a wish ungratified, save that which is dearer and more precious to a woman's heart than all that wealth or luxury can bestow—the wish, the yearning, to be loved. When I was born, five years after the marriage of my parents, my father's disappointment was great at my proving to be a girl ; but my mother clung to her infant with the tenacity of one who felt that

“ All vainly lavish'd
Her other love had been.”

But as years passed on, my father's affection for his only child, and his pride in her who was to inherit all he possessed, strengthened from day to day, and was repaid by a like exclusive devotion on my part. I was not long in imbibing his cold indifference towards my mother—an indifference never indeed expressed, but easy to be perceived. From years of chilling neglect and solitude, her natural timidity had so increased, as to convince me that she was not endued with any real feeling ; and I, fiery, impetuous, and unbridled, could not see through the veil which circumstances had thrown over such a character. My poor mother was not remarkable either for quickness or tact, and I was accustomed to esteem others in proportion rather to their mental powers and acquirements, than to the excellence of their dispositions. I believed, too, that great part of my mother's illness was feigned or fancied, and I gave myself but little concern about her. Thus was she abandoned to almost entire solitude,

spending the weary hours in turning languidly over the pages of a novel as she lay on her sofa, varied only by taking the air in a garden chair in the summer, or going out for a drive in a close carriage in the winter ; her only companions, lap-dogs and canaries. I knew not then how deeply and bitterly she had felt the alienation of her only child, and that she still at times mourned over it with real, though unavailing sorrow ; but years had made her comparatively callous to all her trials, and she lived on, from day to day, in a state of indifference rather than of resignation.

I knew not this ; and little indeed did I know of any of those truths which were of the first importance to me, and should have occupied the first place in my heart. Too late have I become acquainted with them—too late ! These words form a fearful comment on my life, which, though not long in itself, is yet old in the annals of wrong and bitter remorse. And, as I lie on the bed of pain and sickness, which must ere long bring me down to the grave, having lost or survived nearly all that made life most dear and precious to me, these words seem to ring constantly in my ears, in a hollow tone of mockery—"Too late—too late !"

CHAPTER II.

AN hour after the conversation related at the commencement of my first chapter, my father was on his way to Gloucester. Though he travelled as fast as four horses could carry him, he arrived not in time to close his sister's eyes, or hear the last tones of that voice he had once loved so well. During his hasty and rapid journey, better and kinder feelings had resumed their sway; and when the postboys drew up at the private door of a small grocer's shop in a dark narrow street, and he saw in what a home my aunt had passed her dying hours, he was stung to the heart. He could hardly command himself sufficiently to ask the shabby-looking servant-girl how Mrs. Bray was. A moment afterwards he perceived, by the half-closed shutters of the little shop, that the question was unnecessary. He darted up the steep and narrow staircase, but paused at the door, for he heard the sound of stifled sobs within. He opened it so softly, that his entrance was unperceived; and sad indeed was the scene that his eyes beheld.

The room was partially darkened, but he could plainly discern all surrounding objects. In that small, scantily-furnished chamber, far inferior to those occupied by his own servants, lay the lifeless form of his once beautiful sister,—of her who had been reared so delicately and luxuriously. Her face, though so thin and wan, had never lost its sweet expression; but, through the peaceful smile which had stolen over it, might be detected the lines traced there by the cares and sorrows of many years. One hand was still clasped in that of her young daughter, whose face was buried in the bed, and who was freely indulging in those blessed tears which had at last come to her relief.

Poor girl! she felt that she was now indeed alone, with-

out a relation or a friend to whom her life could give pleasure, or her death cause pain.

My father stood for a few seconds, silently gazing on this mournful scene ; he then approached the bed-side, and gently taking his niece's hand, he said—"Agnes, my child, it seems I am too late ; but you will not turn away from *her* brother, who solemnly vows that you shall henceforth be to him as a daughter."

Agnes started from her kneeling position, and looked at him vacantly ; but, collecting herself, she replied—

"Oh ! uncle, if you had been here but three short hours ago, my poor mother would have died in peace. But, oh ! she is at peace now, and would to God it were His will I might follow her and my father to their rest."

This was succeeded by another burst of grief, but Agnes gradually became calmer ; and, in answer to her uncle's questions, she told him that Mr. Arnold had been unremitting in his attentions to her mother ; that he had been with her at her death, and had only quitted the house half an hour before my father's arrival. She added—"Thanks to his thoughtful liberality and kindness, my dearest mother has not wanted for any comfort that he could supply ; but my gratitude to him is not to be expressed by words, and is a debt that I can never hope to repay."

I will not dwell on the feelings of self-reproach with which my father listened to Agnes's details of her mother's lingering illness, and I will also pass over the few melancholy days that intervened until my aunt's funeral. On the one succeeding it, the uncle and niece were in his carriage, posting rapidly home. As they passed the churchyard containing the remains of both her parents, Agnes could not control her strong emotion. My father, who was himself much affected, clasped her hand and said, "Remember, Agnes, you are now my second daughter ;"—but even in that moment he dared not add, as his heart yearned to do, "and my daughter shall be your sister"—for something whispered to him that this would not be.

The travellers reached Vernon Hall about four o'clock, and found my mother and myself in the drawing-room. My father entered with Agnes on his arm ; and, taking her first to his wife, and then to me, introduced her to both. My mother kissed her gently, and in a low voice bade her

welcome ; I, after greeting my father, extended my hand to my cousin, and said—"You must be feeling very tired from your long journey."

Poor Agnes could scarcely repress the rising tears. But she struggled to do so, and merely replied—"Thank you, dear Caroline ; I am rather tired, and, with my aunt's permission, I will go and rest till dinner."

I rang the bell, and desired that my maid should attend Miss Bray to her room. My father had disappeared immediately, but my mother roused herself to say—"I am indeed a sad invalid, my dear Agnes ; but I am sure it is your uncle's wish that you should ask for any thing you may want."

This was Agnes's welcome *home* !

When I saw her again at dinner-time, the traces of tears, but ill-effaced, were on her cheek. Bitter and scalding must have been those tears, drawn forth as they were by that sense of utter misery and desolation which few have not experienced at some period of their lives ; when it seems to us that the deep water-floods have indeed overwhelmed us ; when all the map of life, spread out before us, appears but a dreary waste and blank, and we long, in the depths of our despair, for the peace and repose of the grave.

I was not fully conscious of all the pain I was inflicting : it had crossed my mind that I would accompany my cousin to her room, and there bid her welcome with as much warmth as my sincerity would allow ; but my second thought was, that it was too early for me to intrude upon a grief so sacred, and in which I could feel no hearty sympathy ; and this, joined to a lurking dislike of what I termed "*scenes*," detained me in the drawing-room. I did not know, at least not practically, that sorrow should be the bond of an universal brotherhood, knitting all hearts together, and dissipating all fictitious distinctions of rank and station. I did not know that it is the highest office and privilege of man or woman upon earth, to heal the broken-hearted, and to pour the balm of sympathy and consolation upon the wounded spirit. I did not know that there is a charity still more hallowed in the sight of God than that of almsgiving—even the charity of a warm and generous heart, which finds it yet more blessed to weep with the mourners than to rejoice with the happy. All this I had yet to learn ; and woe to them who at sixteen are wholly untaught in such knowledge ; for fiery

indeed must be the furnace of affliction that can melt their hard and stubborn hearts, and teach them, by their own misery, the capacity of suffering in others.

Agnes had re-entered the drawing-room by six o'clock ; and, before dinner was announced, I had ample opportunity for scrutinizing the new-comer. Her naturally pale face was rendered still more pallid and melancholy by her deep mourning dress. She was neither tall nor short, neither stout nor thin, neither pretty nor plain ; but greatly to my surprise, and, perhaps, secretly rather to my disappointment, I could not help perceiving how entirely, in every look, word, and movement, Agnes Bray was a lady, and as far removed as my haughty self from the slightest approach to vulgarity. Her eyes were of a light grey, her hair was of a pale brown, and the lily of her cheeks was scarcely blended with a trace of the rose. But there was the sweetest possible expression in those grey eyes, betokening—

“ A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent.”

Her voice was low and sweet, but not destitute of animation. Her whole aspect was thoughtful, and indicative of good feeling and good sense, not unmingled with shyness. The first glance satisfied me how little I had to fear from her of rivalry in personal appearance ; but, to do myself justice, I was not really vain. I knew that my dark eyes and hair, clear complexion, and tall slender form, were admired and praised ; but the knowledge of this did not reach my heart, probably from my not having yet met with any one whose devotion or admiration was of any true value to me.

Days, weeks, and even months passed on, and still Agnes and I were almost strangers to each other ; for I persisted in repelling the gentle advances which at first she endeavoured to make towards a closer intimacy, and treated her always with a cold civility, burying myself as much as possible in my own books and occupations, and taking long rides with my father. He was uniformly kind to his niece, but his involuntarily haughty manner somewhat repulsed her ; though his generosity, and his frequent entreaties that she would in all ways feel herself, quite at home, were too warm and genuine to admit a doubt on her part of their sincerity. But at this time she saw very little of him ; for,

having once or twice accepted an invitation from him to join his morning readings with me in the library, she perceived in me such evident and strong symptoms of anger and jealousy, that she wisely forbore to adopt the proposed custom. Even the lessons we both received from masters who came to attend us from —, were separately taken, and our studies separately pursued.

The greater part of Agnes's leisure hours was therefore devoted to my mother, who gradually became so fond of her, and so dependent upon her, that she seemed as if she could hardly bear her niece out of her sight. Agnes was always ready to arrange her work, to read aloud to her, and to contribute in all ways to her comfort. My mother had been in the habit for some time past of dining three or four times a week in her own private room; Agnes persuaded her that it was better for her to make the exertion of coming downstairs, especially when any one joined our little circle; for she soon perceived that her aunt's illness was chiefly mental, and had long been acting on a frame naturally languid and delicate, and reducing her first to despair, then to apathy.

Mr. Mordaunt, the rector of Leyton, a man whom worldly prosperity had not made lukewarm in the duties of his calling, had often regretted that he could not induce me to take any active interest in my poorer neighbours; and though I never refused to contribute from my own amply stocked purse to any request for pecuniary aid, such a request was seldom made, owing, I believe, to Mr. Mordaunt's erroneous impression that it was considered by me rather as a liberty. In Agnes, he and his wife and daughters found a ready and able coadjutor in visiting the poor, attending the Sunday-school, and giving largely, as the liberality of her uncle and aunt enabled her to do. Agnes's gentle voice, her sweet smile, and undoubted sincerity in the expression of sympathy, or the relief of want, caused her to be no less beloved than she was esteemed; and, useful at home and abroad, her life was no longer an unhappy one, though there were still times when the feeling of sadness and loneliness was strong upon her.

One morning, when Agnes had been about a twelvemonth at the hall, Mrs. Mordaunt, her eldest daughter, and her son, who had just quitted Oxford, came to call upon my mother. They found my father and myself ready dressed,

and about to go to Hartley Grange, nine miles distant, to be present at a grand fete given that day in celebration of Lord Tintern, the Earl of Hartley's only son, attaining his majority. The Mordaunts were also on their way there, and they appeared a good deal surprised at seeing Agnes in her usual morning costume, and evidently quite unprepared to accompany us. Henry Mordaunt could not forbear saying—

"Miss Bray, have you no fears of being late for the festive scene, or is your toilet as quickly completed as that of my sister Emma, who never takes more than a quarter of an hour, even when dressing for a ball?"

"I do not think a quarter of an hour would quite satisfy me," replied Agnes; "but I am not going to-day to Lord Hartley's, so I am in no danger of being late."

"Not going!" repeated young Mordaunt, in a tone of incredulous astonishment; "what, is not Lady Hartley aware of your residence here?"

"Lady Hartley was so kind as to send me an invitation," said Agnes, blushing slightly; "but I prefer remaining at home with my aunt."

I felt myself colour deeply, as much from anger as from shame, when Henry fixed his scrutinizing gaze upon my face; for I well knew that Agnes had declined going from the knowledge of how unwelcome her company would have been to me, and I thought I saw that he suspected something of the real truth.

"Miss Vernon," he said, gaily, "do help me to prevail upon your cousin. It will be a splendid affair; ourselves, I dare say, about the only poor commoners present; archery, dancing in tents, ices and champagne in the grotto, fireworks in the park, and a grand dinner to all the tenants and school children—it will be a rare day even for those accustomed to such festivities. Indeed, you ought to come, Miss Bray"—and he added in a lower and more earnest tone, overheard only by me—"and I have been promising myself such pleasure in engaging you for the first dance."

Mrs. Mordaunt and Emily joined their entreaties to Henry's, that Agnes would consent to change her mind, and oblige them; while I was astonished at their thinking it worth while to interest themselves at all in so unimportant a matter.

"Miss Bray has made her own choice," I said: "I believe she prefers remaining with mamma."

"Do not let me be any tie upon you, my dear child," said my mother to Agnes; "I am feeling remarkably well this morning, and would much rather you should go and enjoy yourself."

"There!" exclaimed Henry, triumphantly; "now, Miss Bray, the only impediment is removed, and you are left without the shadow of an excuse for being obstinate."

Henry did but torture Agnes by his importunity, kind and gentlemanly as was his frank manner, with which his fair open countenance accorded well.

Agnes looked distressed, and saying in a hurried manner, quite foreign to her natural one—"Indeed, indeed, it is impossible for me to go!" she laid down her work and left the room. In the doorway she encountered her uncle, who was coming to tell me the carriage was waiting. This was a signal for the Mordaunts to take their departure, greatly to my relief, and apparently to their's also, with the exception of the imperturbable Henry, who, as he passed me, said—"Never mind, Miss Vernon; we shall succeed yet in drawing forth your cousin from her self-chosen retirement."

When they were gone, my father asked me what young Mordaunt had meant by his parting speech?

"Some folly about Agnes not going to the fête," was my reply, in a nettled tone of voice; "just as if she were not altogether unfitted for such scenes, or, as if she could not go if she pleased. I think it is a great pity that people cannot attend to their own affairs, without interfering in those of others; but I suppose the Mordaunts presume upon having known me all my life."

"If I thought for one moment," said my father, "that Agnes would really like to go—but, Caroline, you ascertained her wishes when first the invitation arrived; did you not, my child?"

"Of course I told her of it, papa; but she immediately asked me to decline for her."

"Ay, so I thought," answered my father: "poor girl! her spirits do not rally as one would have expected in so young a person; but time only can do this."

The subject was not resumed; and after my mother had wished us a pleasant day, and received in return a cold "Thank you, mamma," from me, we stepped into the carriage, and in less than an hour had reached the entrance gates of Hartley Grange.

CHAPTER III.

THE sun was unclouded in his majesty, and shone that day upon a lordly spectacle. That day! how every smallest incident of it is treasured in my mind, as though it were yesterday. I will not weary my readers with a lengthened detail of the arrangements for the fête; suffice it to say, that all was conducted in a style of princely hospitality, combined with elegant taste; and that the natural beauties of the domain contributed their more powerful charms to those so liberally supplied by art. And while, among the noble and the wealthy, many a young heart throbbed, and many a young cheek glowed with joy and pleasure, the poor were not forgotten, for they, too, were sharers in the bounty of the good Earl.

The Mordaunts were a few minutes later than ourselves, and for a time we were separated by the throng; but presently Henry edged his way through all obstacles, and, with his usual air of gallantry, asked my hand for the first disengaged dance. I accepted him immediately, as I saw a Captain Spencer advancing towards me, whom I rather disliked, and with whom I was anxious to avoid dancing so early in the day. At the first pause in the dance, Henry recommenced his attack upon me, saying—

“Is it not a pity, Miss Vernon, that a young creature like Miss Bray should so entirely exclude herself from society? On your own account, I am sure you must regret it; for it would be so pleasant for you to have a charming companion of your own age to go every where with you.”

He was silent for a minute; but, finding I made no reply, he continued—

“Were she once induced to accept an invitation, I scarcely think she would hesitate about doing so again; for there is

a charm in her smile and her manner, that must ensure her being a universal favourite."

"Really, Mr. Mordaunt," I replied, in a tone intended to be haughty, but which I am sure must have betrayed no small degree of sulkiness and ill-humour—"really, Mr. Mordaunt, my cousin seems to occupy your thoughts so entirely, that I am surprised you do not endeavour to induce her to take a more important step than that of going to a ball or a dinner party, and so enable yourself to regulate her doings according to your own will and pleasure."

"Nay," said he, seriously; "I am hardly presumptuous enough, with all my assurance, to deem myself worthy of Miss Bray; but from my heart I can say, happy will be the man who wins and wears her."

A curl of the lip was my only reply; but my tormentor's remarks were arrested by a sudden apparition, and one of such exceeding beauty, that I stood for a minute, as it were, spell-bound.

Leaning on the arm of Lord Tintern, who was conducting her to his mother's tent, was a young lady apparently about seventeen or eighteen, whose whole appearance I can only describe as dazzling—a vision beheld but once or twice in our lives, and which leaves its impress upon our memories for ever. She forcibly recalled to my mind those lines preceding the description of the bride of Abydos:—

"Who hath not proved how feebly words essay
To fix one spark of beauty's heavenly ray?
Who doth not feel, until his failing sight
Faints into dimness with its own delight,
His changing cheek, his sinking heart, confess
The might, the majesty of loveliness?"

Onwards she moved; and all eyes were bent upon her, and many tongues were busy in inquiring her name. She was rather above the middle height, and there was a soft *roundness* about her figure, redeeming it from the charge of being too slight, but not in the least impairing the grace of her every movement and gesture. Her eyes were of a sparkling hazel; her luxuriant brown hair, tinged with a rich gold, fell in long curls nearly to her waist; her complexion was brilliantly fair, with a soft colour on her cheek; and the smile which was often playing about her mouth was perfectly bewitching.

This may seem an overwrought and exaggerated description to those who have, not like myself, actually looked upon this beautiful creature ; but those who have, will, I am sure, acquit me ; and perhaps there are some who, from their own experience, may give me credit for not overstepping the bounds of truth in this instance.

It was soon ascertained that her name was Sutherland, and that she was staying with her father, Sir Francis, at Hartley Grange. The young lady, having remained in the house until this minute, had at first led many to suppose that she was only a visiter for the day.

When the quadrille was over, Henry led me to the tent in which Lady Hartley was seated, arranging the archery prizes, to be contended for two or three hours later, and dancing was to be resumed afterwards. Miss Sutherland and some other girls, one of them her own daughter, were assisting our hostess, who, on my entrance, immediately rose to receive me ; and, after greeting me, introduced me to Miss Sutherland. She turned towards me, and extending her hand with one of her brightest smiles, she expressed the greatest pleasure in making the acquaintance of one of whom she had so often heard, but had never chanced to see. I was not proof against such a manner, and such words, uttered in a voice of which every tone was music ; and I gave her my hand with a cordiality almost equal to her own, and again did that beaming smile break forth as she clasped it warmly. Why was it that, at that instant, a sudden, unaccountable thrill shot through me, and I felt myself shrink from her touch, as though it had been doomed to turn all that encountered it to dust and ashes ? Why was it, that one of those darkening shadows, "that strange inborn sense of coming ill," which ever and anon attacks us, even in our hours of mirth, passed over my soul, as I gazed on that bright being, who seemed to revel in sunshine herself, and to be destined to create it for all around her ? And, as I looked up, my eye caught sight of a thunder-cloud on the distant horizon, while the sky above and around us was as glowing as before.

I could not instantly shake off this ominous feeling of gloom, but at length I succeeded in doing so, and joined in conversation with Miss Sutherland and Lord Tintern, who appeared little disposed to quit her side. Henry Mordaunt stood apart, talking to Captain Spencer. During a momen-

tary silence on our part, I heard the latter say to Henry—"Miss Vernon has certainly found a worthy rival at last, and one who, in my mind, would eclipse her, if only from the contrast of her winning manner to Miss Vernon's haughty, unbending one."

I did not hear Henry's reply, for Miss Sutherland asked me at that instant if I had been dancing the first quadrille; adding that, if I were not engaged for the waltz, she should much wish to introduce her brother to me. I said I had already promised myself to another partner, but that I should have great pleasure in becoming known to Mr. Sutherland. The introduction took place, and others now entering the tent, it became somewhat crowded, and Henry offered his arm to escort me back to my father. As we went out, I asked Miss Sutherland if she were not going to dance?

"Not till I have done my best to become the owner of one of those beautiful things," she replied, pointing to the handsome ornaments which lay on the table. "I fear to make my hand unsteady, and I believe most of the fair archers will endeavour to withstand the temptation of dancing until their fate is decided." As the band began to play, she added—"It is very difficult, though, to resist that most captivating of all waltzes, is it not?"

These last words were addressed to the gentleman who now stood next to her, and whom I had not previously seen. I had but a hasty glance of him then, but he struck me as being one of the handsomest and most distinguished young men I had ever met with.

An hour or two passed away; and engaged in dancing and strolling about with my partners, sometimes seeking the cool shade of the grotto, and sometimes resting beneath a tree, I saw no more of Miss Sutherland, her unknown acquaintance, or Lord Tintern, until the commencement of the archery. This took place rather before the appointed hour, owing to the lowering aspect of the heavens, and the prognostications of the weatherwise, that, though all was still bright above us, we should not escape a thunder-storm. I was no archer, and therefore was merely a spectator of the scene. A sudden rush was made by the assembled guests to the ground on which the targets were pitched; and it was not long before I saw Miss Sutherland, as I had first seen her, leaning on the arm of Lord Tintern. She was attired in light blue silk,

with a rich lace scarf over her shoulders, and a bonnet, also of lace, ornamented with blush roses ; and, as they advanced nearer to me, I thought I could perceive, from his glances of earnest admiration, and the half whispers in which he addressed her, that the world for once was not mistaken in its judgment, when it declared Lord Tintern to be devoted to the fair Augusta Sutherland. Whether the impression were mutual, I could not pretend to decide ; for her manner was so frank and cordial to all, and so utterly free from any approach to shyness or timidity, that I could not have told from her aspect and bearing, whether she was listening to the vows of an ardent lover, or the gallantries of a common acquaintance. Lord Tintern was possessed of a grave but intelligent countenance, and his appearance was gentleman-like ; but no one, I think, would have termed him handsome or particularly striking, as far as externals were concerned.

Contrary to the original arrangements, the gentlemen shot first, owing to a young lady, and one who excelled in the art, having hurt her ankle, and gone into the house to bathe it, still hoping to be able to enter the lists against her fair competitors. The sport commenced, and when all had shot but one, Captain Spencer's arrow was nearest to the bull's eye, having in fact touched the edge of it. The young man whose appearance had so arrested my attention, now stepped forward ; and, taking a still truer aim, was pronounced the winner of the highest prize, which he received from the hands of Lady Hartley.

I inquired of the gentleman who was standing next to me, the name of the successful marksman ; but he replied that he did not know it, and had just been asking the same question himself. Mr. Mowbray added, that he believed him to be quite a stranger in the neighbourhood, and to have lately arrived on a visit at the Grange.

"But here comes my sister," he continued, as Lady Helen Mowbray now appeared, limping slightly from the blow she had received. "No one had any doubt of her being the best lady archer here to-day, but I fear the shock will have unsteadied her hand."

The event proved that his apprehensions were not groundless, for Lady Helen obtained but the third prize, while the highest was awarded to Miss Sutherland. She took the beautiful bracelet from our hostess, saying, as she did so—

"Fortune has not belied her character, or been less capricious than usual, on this occasion, for there can be but one opinion as to the rightful owner of this lovely ornament, and not as a gift, but as her undoubted right, I pray Lady Helen Mowbray to take it."

Lady Helen of course refused; and Augusta, after once more assuring her that the offer was renewed in all sincerity, showed that she had too much good taste to make a scene by pressing the point further, and, retaining the bracelet, she said (I thought with a slight glance at Lord Tintern)—

"I shall ever value my beautiful prize, especially remembering when and where I won it; but I shall always bear in mind that my good-luck has been merely the result of accident."

Lady Helen looked pleased at Miss Sutherland's cordial way of saying this; and many were the eulogiums passed on all sides upon the evidently sweet disposition, which so heightened and enhanced the magical effect even of such beauty as her's. At this moment I heard the voice of a gentleman behind me, murmuring in a low tone to his companion—

"All is not gold that glitters; those who know Miss Sutherland as I do——" and then, amidst the crowd and constant movement, I lost the remainder of the sentence. What I had heard, however, was quite enough to set me pondering on the hidden meaning of these words.

"Is it possible," was my reflection, "that deceit can lurk beneath that fair open countenance? That beaming smile—those kind sentiments so kindly spoken—can they conceal thoughts and feelings dark and revengeful as my own? No! it can never be! The man must have been some presumptuous, disappointed suitor."

I looked up at that instant, and encountered Augusta's gaze fixed upon me; and, as our eyes met, I fancied that a momentary flash gleamed from her's, little in accordance with their usual sweet, though animated, expression. This, joined to the remembrance of the shudder I had experienced at our introduction that morning, impressed me strongly; for, with all my supposed strength of mind, I was far from being devoid of superstition; and though I could not forbear looking on her beautiful face, whenever I could do so unperceived, I felt as though her fascination were to me as that of the rattlesnake.

I was roused from my reverie by Captain Spencer, who came to claim my hand for a waltz. I had refused him two or three times, on the plea (a true one) of being otherwise engaged; but at length he had begged me to name the time at which I should be at liberty; and, knowing him to excel in the Terpsichorean art, I had promised him the first waltz after the conclusion of the archery. The first dance proved to be a waltz, and we walked towards that most level part of the velvet lawn on which we had previously performed.

I have said that I rather disliked Captain Spencer; but this feeling was gradually giving way beneath the influence of his constant and untiring devotion to me, notwithstanding all my scornful coldness; and from my conviction that many a handsome woman would gladly surrender half her train of commonplace admirers to secure his attentions to herself. The speech I had heard him make that morning had not nettled me, for I knew it to be an ebullition of pique at the avoidance of him, which he could not have failed to see that I had exhibited. Not that the idea of loving or marrying Captain Spencer had ever once crossed my mind as a possibility; but he was handsome, his conversation was witty and amusing, and I knew him to be most sincerely attached to me. Perhaps this day did more to alter the current of my feelings towards him than many previous months had effected; although I well knew that he had intended me to overhear his complimentary remarks on Miss Sutherland, and to be annoyed by them. He was the son of Lord Belmont (whose seat was about fifteen miles from Vernon Hall); and he had, on leaving college, obtained a commission in the guards. He was quick and superficially clever, the idol of all ladies on whom he deigned to bestow any of his attention, and the envy of the far more numerous class who were not so favoured. There was but one present that day who outshone him in my eyes; and, in the judgment of many, Captain Spencer might probably have equalled, in the charm of appearance and manner, his (to me) unknown rival.

We paused at length to rest; and, to my surprise, I perceived Miss Sutherland waltzing, not with Lord Tintern, but with the stranger who had excited my curiosity. But in an instant I remembered that Lord Tintern attempted no deeper mysteries than those of the quadrille or country

dance; and I thought a somewhat gloomy expression, approaching to a frown, was visible on his brow as he watched the inimitably graceful movements of his beloved. I observed to Captain Spencer that Lord Tintern was evidently most deeply smitten with Miss Sutherland, and I asked him whether he thought the attachment was mutual.

"No," he replied, decidedly, "I do not. I believe what heart she has to give is already bestowed on her present partner; but that she will marry Lord Tintern I have not the slightest doubt."

"And why," I asked, "if she does indeed love another?"

Captain Spencer smiled; and pointing first to the lordly domain which, in its richness and beauty, was only terminated in extent by the distant hills, and then to the coronet on one of Lord Hartley's handsome equipages, which stood in readiness to convey an invalid home—

"Behold my answer to your question," he said, "in these inanimate but irresistible objects of desire; irresistible, at least, to an ambitious girl like Miss Sutherland."

"And can you tell me the name and abode of her partner?"

"Yes," he replied; "he is an intimate friend of mine, in my own regiment. His name is Arthur Mildmay, and his mother lives near London; his father died when he was little more than an infant."

Mildmay! the name appeared to me associated with some indistinct vision of my early childhood, but I knew not why or how.

"And does Mr. Mildmay love Miss Sutherland?" I asked, in a tone of rather more interest than seemed altogether pleasing to my companion; for he answered, with an air of ill-assumed carelessness—

"Really, Miss Vernon, I cannot pretend to satisfy your curiosity on this point. I am not his father-confessor; but I think I might venture to say, pretty decidedly, that Captain Mildmay is not a marrying man."

"Nay," I answered, laughing a little contemptuously: "I did not know why you should be so well acquainted with the state of Miss Sutherland's affections, who is merely an acquaintance, and so utterly ignorant of the feelings of Captain Mildmay, your intimate friend."

At this juncture our remarks were arrested by a blinding

flash of lightning, succeeded, with scarcely a moment's interval, by a most awful and prolonged thunder-clap, which burst with a crashing sound immediately over our heads, and, on looking up, we saw Lady Hartley's beautiful Turkish tent, which had been pitched beneath a lofty oak, in flames.

An instant afterwards, and Arthur Mildmay appeared, emerging as it were from the midst of the fire, and bearing in his arms the seemingly lifeless form of Miss Sutherland, who was pale as death, with the blood flowing copiously from her shoulder.

Our thoughts had been so occupied, that we, with some others, had not observed the rapid approach of the storm, for it had been dark and lowering for some time past, and the low and distant rumbling which had been heard not long before seemed to have passed away. Neither had we perceived the retreat of Augusta and her partner to the tent, of which they were the sole occupants when the lightning struck *it*, but providentially not *them*. We learned that Miss Sutherland was sitting, and Arthur standing at a short distance from her, when the electric fluid shivered one of the massive poles which supported the tent, and close to which was Miss Sutherland's chair. Captain Mildmay, who at once saw her danger, darted forwards, and, dragging her away, saved her life at the risk of his own; but even his instantaneous movement could not prevent her receiving a heavy blow on the shoulder from the falling timber. She uttered a loud cry of pain and terror, and immediately fainted. She was borne into the house, and a servant was sent off with the utmost haste for the nearest medical man.

Lord Tintern had retired to another part of the grounds, impatient probably of the length of the waltz which detained his Augusta from him; and never shall I forget the look of anguish and despair depicted on his countenance, as he rushed wildly past us towards the house. His first action, after one hasty glance at her, was to despatch a trusty messenger to town with instructions to take four fresh horses at the end of every stage, and halt not on any pretext till he had reached London, when he was to seek one of the most eminent surgeons, and bring him to Hartley Grange, with the same speed he had himself employed in travelling thither. This Lord Tintern did without consulting even

Sir Francis Sutherland ; and, when done, it seemed some relief to his mind.

Long did Augusta remain insensible, and when at length she opened her eyes, it was only to look vacantly around her for a few seconds, and subside into her former unconscious state. The village doctor was attending a case of life and death, which, though that of a poor labourer's wife, he felt it impossible to leave just then. Poor Lord Tintern was nearly maddened by suspense ; and Sir Francis and his son were greatly distressed.

After the space of an hour, Augusta began to show symptoms of amendment, and in about five minutes Mr. Stockwell was descried, urging his jaded horse with all possible speed up the avenue. To the joy of all, and the deep, heartfelt thankfulness of Lord Tintern, he pronounced his patient to be in no danger, and to be suffering more from the shock and alarm she had undergone, than from any severe bodily injury. Augusta was now able to speak, and to inquire into the particulars of her accident, of which she had but a vague and confused remembrance. She begged that Lady Hartley would convey to Captain Mildmay her warmest thanks for his prompt assistance, which had certainly been the means of saving her life.

This untoward event of course put a stop to the day's entertainments, and all the guests, whose abodes were in the neighbourhood, ordered their carriages to be got ready without delay. The storm had raged for about half an hour, and had gradually subsided. The sun was going down in full splendour, and the evening was as lovely, and less sultry, than it would have been without the lightning and the rain, which for a time had seemed to descend in a sheet of water.

As my father and myself drove home, after discussing Miss Sutherland's adventure, he said—

" I have had a great and unexpected pleasure to-day, Caroline. Not long before Miss Sutherland's accident, I discovered that the young man, who was afterwards her preserver, was the son of my almost only early friend. You have heard me speak of Mildmay, I think, dear ? "

This was then the clue I had wanted to that name.

" Yes, papa," I answered, " though not often, or lately, I have heard you mention General Mildmay. Captain Spencer has been long dead."

"Yes," said my father with a sigh ; "the few, the very few, who loved me in my youth are all gone now, and while they remained to me, I did not prize them as I ought. But," he added in a more cheerful tone, "is not Arthur a fine handsome young fellow, Caroline? I think he threw even your admirer, Captain Spencer, into the shade in the eyes of many of the young ladies."

"Captain Mildmay is the most striking person I have ever seen," I replied with warmth.

My father looked pleased, and said—

"Had I been told earlier in the day who he was, I should at once have introduced you to each other ; indeed, I was going to do so after the very dance which terminated so disastrously. But it does not really signify ; for he has faithfully promised me that, should he be obliged to return to town without paying us a visit, he will take the earliest opportunity of getting away again, and coming straight to Vernon Hall."

"I rejoice to hear it," was my reply ; "I am sure he will be a great favourite of mine."

CHAPTER IV.

WE reached home about nine o'clock ; and, as we were not expected for the next two or three hours, my mother was naturally surprised at our returning so early, and inquired the reason. While my father gave her a short account of the day's adventures, my eyes wandered round the room, only lighted by the dim twilight rapidly fading into darkness, in search of Agnes. Not seeing her, I asked my mother where she was.

"She has strolled out into the shrubbery to enjoy this beautiful evening," said my mother. "Poor girl! she had quite one of her old fits of low spirits after you went this morning, and I was afraid it was because she had stayed away from the fête ; but she assured me that she would not on any account have gone, and that she had been foolishly dwelling on past times. However, she soon recovered her cheerfulness after she had been working about half an hour at my rug. Indeed, I don't know what would become of me without Agnes ; she is quite a second daughter to me."

A second daughter ! Oh, my mother, how little I deserved such consideration to my feelings as those words implied ! An only daughter would have expressed the real state of the case far more truly. Even then I experienced a pang of self-reproach, but, chasing it away, I said—

"Well, mamma, I do not see much chance of your being deprived of her ;" and I added mentally—"Mamma never could have loved me—we have nothing in common ; Agnes is cold and gentle like herself, and just suits her."

At this moment Agnes stepped in at the open window, and, coming up to me, she said kindly that she hoped I had enjoyed myself that day : and, seeing that I looked rather tired, she proceeded to relieve me of my bonnet and scarf,

and to wheel an easy-chair into the recess in which I was seated. Not a trace of the morning's vexation was visible on her countenance ; and I, who could hardly believe in the existence of such a disposition as emanating from any other source than apathy and insensibility, sat gloomily pondering over the events of the day.

They haunted me when I had retired to my room, and mingled with my nocturnal visions. I could not help being inwardly annoyed to think I had fallen in Henry Mordaunt's opinion ; for I knew that he possessed those qualifications which can alone make the judgment of any one valuable—a good heart and a good understanding.

Neither could I afford to “look down” on the Mordaunts on the score of family ; for I knew their's to be as ancient as my own. Then my thoughts turned to Arthur Mildmay, the admiration I had felt for him in his presence being undiminished when he was no longer before me ; and I could not account to myself for the great pleasure with which I looked forward to his promised visit at Vernon Hall.

At length, but not till past three o'clock, I closed my weary eyes, and even then my sleep was restless and troubled. I dreamed that we stood once more on Lord Hartley's lawn, the sun as dazzling, the surrounding scene as beautiful, as on that morning ; and all appeared the same, save that Agnes was with us. And I dreamed that I leant upon Arthur's arm, and talked to him of many things, though not of love ; but I thought he looked kindly upon me, and I knew that he spoke well and wisely, and that his words showed his heart to be noble and generous, his mind to be polished, and conversant with truth and knowledge. And while I listened, Captain Spencer approached me with a glittering cup in his hand, and smiled as he offered it to me, bidding me to drink. While I hesitated a moment, Agnes sprang forward, snatched the cup from his hand, and dashed the contents on the ground, even to the last drop. I turned angrily upon her ; but at that instant the thunder-cloud again burst over us, and where Captain Spencer had stood, I now saw Augusta, or rather an angry, hissing snake, with her beautiful face, and the body of the reptile. She was about to dart at Arthur and myself, and wreath her fatal coils around us, when I started from my horrid dream, to the waking reality of a bright summer morning. It was still early,

but I could not sleep again ; so I rose, and wandered and sat in the garden, with my usual companion in the shape of a book, till breakfast-time.

On the following morning the post-bag was brought in, as usual, ere we had concluded the repast ; and among other letters was one from Mrs. Bouverie, a cousin of my father, pressing me to go immediately to her house in Grosvenor-street, to partake with her eldest daughter of the gaieties of a London season. Eleanor Bouverie, she said, had been prevented by a severe attack of the measles from going any where before this advanced period of the spring ; and she added, that if I liked to bring my cousin, Agnes Bray, with me, she too would be heartily welcome. My father gave me the letter, desiring me to do as I pleased.

"If you have any curiosity to see something of the gay world, Caroline," he said, "you could scarcely enter it under better auspices than those of my cousin Katherine ; a beauty in her day, and still a woman of fashion, and, I believe, sincerely attached to us all. Whose handwriting is this ?" he continued, looking at the address of another letter.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it is from Captain Mildmay."

My father opened it, and read as follows—

"HARTLEY GRANGE, *May* —, 18—.

"MY DEAR SIR—It is with great regret that I write to inform you of my unavoidable return to town this very day, and the consequent postponement of the pleasure I had promised myself in visiting Vernon Hall next week. The cause of my sudden recall to London, or rather Richmond, is the dangerous illness of my younger sister Geraldine. I have not a minute now to spare for giving further particulars, but I will write from home, as I know you will be interested in hearing of my sister. I rejoice that I can give an excellent report of Miss Sutherland, who is progressing most favourably.

"With the hope of seeing you before many weeks are over, I remain, dear sir, most sincerely your's,

"ARTHUR G. MILDMAV."

My father and I were both disappointed at this intelligence, and felt grieved to think of his anxiety and distress. After some consultation, it was agreed that I should accept Mrs. Bouverie's invitation, and go to town early in the following week ; Agnes being most sincere in her wish to

decline it. I knew I should be too late to be presented that year, but still I resolved to go.

Mrs. Bouverie and Eleanor received me very kindly, and were evidently desirous in all ways to promote my amusement. Mrs. Bouverie was a rich widow of forty, retaining the traces of great beauty. Her daughter was barely pretty, but possessed of a graceful figure, and an air of fashion. I remained with them in town till the end of June, and accompanied them in a tour round the Isle of Wight, which lasted for about a fortnight. During my sojourn in London, my reputation as so large an heiress was alone sufficient to procure me many admirers of rank and station ; and out of this number there were two or three who, I believe, really sought me for myself and my own attractions ; but I was equally indifferent to all, and even the unwearying assiduities of Captain Spencer failed in producing any corresponding feeling on my part.

I can look back upon those few weeks as a period of uninterrupted enjoyment. I had parted kindly with Agnes, and I wrote to her several times ; I was strong in the consciousness of youth, health, and beauty, and on all sides courted and admired to a degree to which few girls could have been indifferent. I had, however, no opportunity of becoming known to Arthur Mildmay ; for, as I heard from home, he had reached Richmond only to find Geraldine already dead ; and, after passing three weeks with his sorrowing mother and remaining sister, had gone at once to Vernon Hall, where, at this season of the year, he was sure of finding nothing in the shape of gaiety.

I constantly met Miss Sutherland, whose accident had not prevented her entering into the entertainments of the remainder of the London season. We all went one evening to a large ball given by Lady Sutherland ; and Augusta, whose manner to me was always most cordial, seemed on that occasion to single me out as the object of her especial attention. Lord Tintern was constant at his post, and the affair was now spoken of as settled among their friends and acquaintances, although the engagement had not yet been formally announced.

That evening Miss Sutherland chose to dance but little ; and leading me into a recess, where stood a most tempting ottoman, she said she observed I was rather tired, and, as that was her case likewise, she thought we could not do

better than rest awhile. For some little time, the spot chosen for our retreat was undiscovered, and we conversed without interruption. She spoke of Arthur Mildmay, whom she had known for years; and I thought I could detect a slight tremulousness in her voice, and a less joyous expression in her eye, as she dwelt upon his many excellent and attractive qualities, and regretted "for his own sake, and that of his mother and sister, that he had not more of that dross which men bow down to as to an idol. And women too," she added, "and truly one knows not how to blame them. Educated in the midst of grandeur and luxury—taught by precept, by example, and by their own experience to consider wealth as of paramount importance—surely we should not too harshly condemn a girl whose affections are not all-powerful enough to make her cast aside all such considerations, and give her hand, where her heart, perhaps, is already given, to one worthy of her in all ways, but with the fatal curse of poverty clinging to him, at once an insuperable barrier between them. What happiness," she continued, "to be rich like you, Caroline, and thus enabled to spurn all vile thoughts of pounds, shillings, and pence, save that of sharing them with the object of one's devoted love!" Here she checked herself, as though she had gone too far, adding in a quieter tone—"But happier still when that object combines this world's advantages with all that can command one's affection and esteem;" and raising her eyes at this moment, she saw Lord Tintern by her side.

"Why have you and Miss Vernon been hiding yourselves, Angus—Miss Sutherland?" he asked. "Every one has been looking for you."

There was a slight shade upon his brow, which was instantly dispelled by Augusta's bright smile and good-humoured voice, as she said—

"Miss Vernon and I were both rather tired; so, in order not to lose the time altogether, we have been moralizing as we sat here upon the hollowness of worldly enjoyments, and the vanity of worldly pursuits. But I am already wearied, and so, I am sure, is Miss Vernon, of such hackneyed stuff; and now, Lord Tintern, I am quite refreshed and ready for our quadrille." So saying, she took his offered arm, adding, that she should inform my despairing partner in what quarter I was to be found.

I will pass over the remainder of my visit in London, as consisting of an unceasing round of gaiety, each succeeding day differed but little from its predecessor.

The morning before we departed for our tour round the island, I received two visitors in Mrs. Bouverie's drawing-room. The first was Captain Spencer, who sought me at that hour, knowing that, from my habit of rising earlier than the other ladies, he should probably find me alone. He came to offer me his hand; his heart I knew I had long possessed; but I at once refused the former, and said I trusted ere long he would meet with a worthier object on which to bestow the latter. He was a man of strong passions and feelings, of some high and generous impulses; but his vices were totally unchecked by principle, and his actions were uninfluenced by any motives of piety or religion. Perhaps these deficiencies did not at that time weigh with me as they ought to have done in my rejection of his suit; my reason was the simple, and to me the all-sufficient one, that, though I had learnt to like him, and appreciate his society, I did not entertain for him any sentiment the least approaching to love. It was evident that he was quite unprepared for so decided a refusal; for his pale cheek became perfectly ghastly in its whiteness, his brow contracted, and his energies seemed paralysed for the moment. Recovering himself, he addressed me again in tones of strong emotion:—

"Oh, Caroline!" he said, "is it thus coldly that you spurn one who has loved you devotedly for months, ay, for years? Truly, every thought of my mind, every feeling of my heart, is concentrated in you: my whole happiness is in your hands—to make it, or cast it away for ever! A kind word or smile from you has had the power to madden me with delight; a frown, or, worse still, a look of indifference, has plunged me in despair. Give me time—let me but hope," he continued, with increasing earnestness; "let me cling to the slightest straw—Oh, Heaven! you little dream of the misery you are inflicting!"

And the man of fashion, so proud, so uncaring, covered his face with both his hands, and threw himself at my feet, as though his life or death rested on my decision, subdued by the might of his love for me.

I could not remain unmoved, though my resolution faltered

not. I took his hand for an instant in mine—it thrilled as though the touch had been upon his heart—and said in a gentle voice, but still firmly—

“Captain Spencer, I implore you to rise and be calm. My regard, my warm and sincere friendship, are your’s now and for ever ; more than this, I cannot give you ; and believe me, were I now to grant your suit, the time would quickly come when you would most bitterly repent your fatal error in having wedded one whose heart could never be yours. You are indeed worthy of better things : you are worthy of being loved as you now love me ; and I trust the day is not far distant when I shall see Captain Spencer”——

“Cease, Miss Vernon !” he exclaimed, almost fiercely ; “at least spare your victim these taunts ; and, oh ! answer me one question, the last with which I will now torment you. Is it a prepossession for another that is the cause of your rejection of me ?”

He gazed at me earnestly as he said this, and I met the flash of his keen bright eyes unflinchingly, as I replied without hesitation—

“No, it is not. I like you as well, or perhaps better, than any man of my acquaintance, but I do not love you, and I know I never shall ; *that* is why I refuse you.”

“Then I will *never* despair,” he answered, “while we both live. Married or single, Miss Vernon, the remembrance of this hour shall haunt you through life, and be mingled with your dying thoughts.”

These words were but just uttered when the door opened, and Miss Sutherland was announced. Captain Spencer was himself again in a moment ; and, when he advanced to shake hands with Augusta, not the most penetrating eye could have discerned that any moving or exciting subject had been the theme of our discourse. I must have betrayed some confusion, notwithstanding my usual self-possession ; but I believe my emotion proceeded chiefly from Captain Spencer’s last words, coupled with Augusta Sutherland’s appearance at that very instant—it seemed to me as a twofold prophecy, as the involuntary shrinking I had felt at our first introduction, and my subsequent dream, recurred to my mind. Her quick perception immediately discovered that something had been passing between us of more than ordinary interest ; and she apologized for her intrusion at that early hour, fearing

she had interrupted us. Captain Spencer talked and laughed with her for a few minutes, until my calmness was quite restored; and then he rose, and took his leave of us both, saying, as he bade me adieu, that he hoped we should meet ere long in our own part of the country.

When Miss Sutherland and I were left together, she did not, as I had expected, attempt to sound me on the subject of Captain Spencer; but she told me that Lord Tintern and his sister, Lady Laura, were waiting for her in the carriage at the door, and therefore she had no time to lose.

"But I could not allow you to depart, dear Caroline, without one last kiss—one more last word; and also I am anxious to impart my happiness to you, who, I am sure, feel an interest in it, especially as it is now and henceforth entwined with that of a very old friend of yours. Can you guess my meaning?"

"Yes," I answered, "I think I can. I believe I may have the pleasure of congratulating you on your engagement with Lord Tintern, and most warmly do I wish you both many, many years of ever-increasing happiness. I have known him from a child, and all that I have seen of him myself, and heard of him from others, assures me of his excellence, and makes me feel certain, that he will prove the best and most devoted of husbands. You must wish him joy for me of his beautiful prize," I added; for this compliment I could pay in all sincerity.

Augusta claimed my services as a bridesmaid, unless I should first require hers; for, owing to various circumstances, their union was not to take place for several months. I, of course, readily complied with her request, and expressed my gratification at it; and, then rising, she said she had still one little favour to ask of me. She took from her bag a small packet, and proceeded—

"Will you, dear Caroline, with your own hands place this trifle in those of Arthur Mildmay? I am anxious to send him a slight token of my gratitude to him as my preserver, and also of the friendship I must ever have for him. I have chosen a little ring, worthless enough in itself, but it contains a lock of my hair, and may serve sometimes to remind him of his old playmate. And now, farewell; and God bless you, dear Caroline!"

She embraced me, and was gone.

The praise I have bestowed upon Augusta may seem very negative ; but, if we look around us, we shall perhaps see, that it is not so *very* common to meet with those who never say scandalous or ill-natured things of their neighbours, without a strong or interested motive for so doing. Augusta's extreme beauty and grace certainly placed her above the womanly feelings of envy and jealousy ; but beyond and besides this, her disposition had been a good-natured one from her childhood ; and, had it been duly fostered and nurtured, she would probably have deserved the appellation of a very amiable woman. But the great fault, which was also innate, was unchecked by the voice of parental admonition ; and, unguided by principle, taught both by precept and example that the end and aim of her existence was to obtain admiration, and to make a great match, Augusta did full justice to her education. She would, perhaps, at this time, have turned aside with unaffected dislike of a downright falsehood, unless *very* strongly tempted to utter it ; but the same falsehood, glossed over, disguised, and varnished, would be in her eyes not only excusable, but harmless.

Her father, at the moment of her engagement to Lord Tintern, was all but a ruined man ; and for several years the state of his affairs had been rapidly becoming more and more involved. Lady Sutherland was a weak, silly woman, who rouged a little more each succeeding spring ; dressed most expensively, and in the height of the fashion ; and, by wearing very low dresses, took particular pains to expose to view a skinny, bony, withered neck, in hue very closely resembling mahogany, or parchment. Religion was to her nothing more than a name or a shadow ; or, if ever invested in her mind with any form approaching to reality, it was only as connected with country parsons and poor people. Her daughter had imbibed these notions nearly to the extent in which they were held by her mother : though I could not then believe that Augusta was entirely playing a part, when I heard her talk so gravely and seriously to Lord Tintern on the subject of almshouses, schools, and the various improvements in the state of the labouring classes around him, which he hoped to effect, when he took possession of the house and estate, presented to him by his father on his completing his twenty-first year.

Lord Tintern was more serious and thoughtful than young

there is of good and of evil in all save the wholly depraved, and that God only can draw the line between the children of His kingdom and the children of darkness, which we so presumptuously, and often so erroneously, take upon us to define :—

“Then gently scan your brother man,
 Still gentler sister woman ;
 Though they may gang a kennin’ wrang,
 Still error is but human :
 One point must still be mainly dark,
 The moving why they do it ;
 And just as lamely can ye mark
 How far perhaps they rue it.
 Who made the heart, ’tis He alone
 Decidedly can try us ;
 He knows each chord, its various tone ;
 Each spring, its various bias :
 Then at the balance let’s be mute,
 We never can adjust it ;
 What’s *done* we partly may compute,
 But know not what’s *resisted*.”

Had I known Augusta then as I have since known her, my judgment of her would have been, that, though possessing attractive, and even amiable qualities, she was destitute of that which can alone give value or stability to character—I mean sincerity. Not that any one is thoroughly sincere ; for is there, has there ever been, man or woman, who could bear to lay open every secret thought and motive of their hearts—who could bear to be known by others as they know themselves, imperfect as that knowledge is ? But I felt that there were some whose prevailing characteristic is honesty ; and, even at that moment, Agnes involuntarily recurred to my mind as the most perfect living type of that virtue with which I was acquainted.

Augusta, as my subsequent experience of her has taught me, was good-natured when it did not really put her out of her way to be so, and preferred seeing happy rather than gloomy faces around her. She rarely spoke ill of any one unless they had offended her, or were opposed to her wishes or interests ; and this disposition, partly natural to her, partly the result of her desire to please and to be liked, contributed not a little to the *prestige* of her beauty, which in its turn reflected a charm on all she said or did.

I was very tired, and glad to retire early to rest. The next morning after breakfast, my father and Agnes walked across the park to the village; the former to call on Mr. Mordaunt, the latter to execute a commission for my mother. I took a book, and chose a shady seat on the lawn, where I had not long established myself before I saw Henry Mordaunt advancing towards me. He had not met Agnes and her uncle, as they had gone by a different path; and, after inquiring whether Miss Bray was likely to return soon, and receiving my answer in the affirmative, he said he would extend his walk, and come back in an hour's time.

"Nay, Henry," I said; "this is scarcely courteous towards me, considering how long it is since we last met. Do you hate me so entirely, that you cannot make up your mind to bestow a few minutes of your society upon me?"

Henry did not reply in his usual bantering tone; and, as my eye at that moment encountered his, I was startled to see its agitated expression.

"What is the matter, Henry?" I asked; "you are not well."

"I am indeed perfectly well, my dear Miss Vernon," he said, detaining me, and taking a seat by my side; "but the heat—or rather (for why should I not tell the truth?) there is a load on my spirits which I seldom experience, and I hope it may soon be removed. And now," he continued, in a forced tone of gaiety, "tell me all about your visit to London, and the innumerable conquests you have achieved. Poor Spencer, I hear, has come down into the country, quite broken-hearted, and even talking of not going to the Cowes regatta, so his must be a desperate case indeed. And, now, I suppose Captain Mildmay is to be the next victim, and then"——

Here Henry paused, and started, as a light footstep was heard behind us; but it was only that of a young servant crossing the lawn after her mistress's spaniel. My curiosity was considerably aroused, but I did not choose to question Henry point-blank as to what his business with my cousin might be.

"How remarkably well Agnes is looking!" I said, trying to feel my way; "have you and your sisters seen much of her during my absence?"

"Yes, a good deal, until we went away ourselves," he

answered in a firm tone of voice ; " and each interview has established her more firmly in my mind as the living embodiment of woman's virtue, and woman's greatest charm, a warm and affectionate heart."

" Nay, there you are mistaken, Henry," I said. " Agnes is all that is good and excellent, but she is utterly devoid of deep feeling or strong emotion."

" She is not," rejoined Henry angrily ; " devoid of deep feeling !—that expression to me only implies the absence of a bad and violent temper, which shelters itself under the excuse of some fancied slight or injury, casting gloom and wretchedness on all around it, and rendering its own possessor miserable. I hate such cant and jargon ;" and here he rose, and walked up and down hurriedly, adding, " Before I leave the Hall this morning, my fate for life shall be decided—and it rests in her hand to make me the happiest or the most miserable of men."

I was startled by the vehemence of his language, and still more by the information his words conveyed ; for I had never imagined that Henry had really any other sentiment for Agnes than that of pity for an orphan girl, whom he had kindly patronised from the natural good-nature of his disposition, and perhaps from the idea that she was not sufficiently regarded by me. I was silent for a time with astonishment. I knew that Henry would inherit considerable property from both his parents ; and I surmised that Mrs. Mordaunt had just enough of worldliness in her to have set her heart on her son's marrying well, if I may use the term in the sense in which it is generally understood. I believed that she had her eye on Lord Hartley's second daughter, Laura, a young girl of sixteen, who was very fond of Henry, though hitherto her fondness for him had been that of a child for an elder playmate ; and I had quite thought that Henry's heart seconded his mother's wishes.

" Henry," I said at length, " if you are really in earnest in your professed intentions, I do most sincerely beg you to pardon and forget what I have said ; and now let me wish you all possible happiness."

" Success, you should say," replied Henry with a sigh, and he strolled away towards the shrubbery.

" Success !" I repeated to myself, " there is little doubt about that. How amazed poor Agnes will be at her good

fortune; and were it not that Henry might do so much better, I should heartily rejoice at it."

I sat for some time musing on

"The various turns of fate below;"

my reflective mood being rather encouraged by the increasing heat, and the stillness and silence which reigned around me, only broken at intervals by the cawing of the rooks, the twitter of the water-wagtails as they darted on their insect prey, or the hum of the bees as they floated past me. How I loved every inch of the scene stretched out before me! those ancient and gnarled oaks, with the deer reposing beneath them; that beautiful expanse of park, with its undulating surface, its deep and wooded glens; and the lake, now sparkling as one mass of light, with the sunbeams playing upon it.

On its banks I again saw Henry, who had evidently chosen that path in the hope of meeting Agnes. He was not disappointed; for after taking a few turns on the margin of the lake, apparently intently occupied in watching the incessant leaping of the fish, Agnes was discerned, both by him and by me, returning alone. I saw them meet and shake hands, and walk away together in the direction of the shrubbery, which Henry had just quitted, and where I again lost sight of them. A quarter of an hour had scarcely elapsed, before Agnes emerged from it, and with a hurried step was advancing towards the house. She did not see me, till she was close by me. Her face was flushed, and there was a tear on either cheek; but still she seemed less agitated than I should have expected a girl so circumstanced to have been, when fresh from the acceptance of so desirable, and (as I felt convinced it must be) so unlooked for, an offer.

"I wish you joy, my dear Agnes," I said.

She looked surprised at my words, or rather at the knowledge they implied on my part of what had just passed; but she replied—

"Oh no! not joy, dear Caroline. I cannot but be gratified by the preference of one so excellent and attractive; but indeed I do earnestly wish that he had bestowed his affections on a more worthy object."

"At all events, Agnes," I said, "you will be a happy woman as his wife."

"As his wife!" repeated Agnes; "but, dear Caroline, I have refused him."

"Refused him? impossible!" I cried; "and without speaking to your uncle, who I am sure would open your eyes to your great good fortune in having gained the affections of Mr. Mordaunt."

"It is quite possible, Caroline," answered Agnes proudly — "it is quite possible that I should have refused even Mr. Mordaunt, whom I so esteem and value; and, moreover, it is really the case."

"But why, Agnes?" I asked.

"Because I do not love him," she replied, in her usual gentle tone; and, without saying more, she left me and entered the house.

"Wonders will never cease!" I said to myself; "one half hour I am all astonishment at a young man of good fortune and family, of prepossessing appearance and a lively disposition, thinking fit to make an offer to a girl destitute of all these advantages, and without either beauty or talent to make one forget the want of them; the next, I am petrified at the discovery, that this young damsel has refused him, and the station and wealth he would fain have given her, with as much coolness as if she were an aristocratic beauty, surrounded by noble suitors! My father will never believe it."

I now saw him returning through the park, and when he came up to me, I told him the first part of my story, and paused, expecting an exclamation of wonder.

"Well," he said, "I am not at all surprised, and I rejoice to hear it. Mordaunt has shown himself possessed of good sense and discrimination; for he has chosen one who would make any home happy, and he is an excellent fellow, and deserving of her. But what did Agnes say to his proposal?"

"She refused him at once," I replied; "but, papa, surely you cannot regret it on his account, for I am greatly mistaken if he might not easily gain the affections of Lady Laura Tintern."

"Has Agnes really refused him?" asked my father in a tone of disappointment, and without taking any notice of my last remark. "Well! she must be the best and the only judge of her own happiness; but I am very sorry. What could be her motive? I should have fancied him the very

man to attract Agnes ; and it could not be any silly scruple about being a portionless bride, for I set her mind at ease on that subject only the other day."

I could not understand my father's words at all ; however, I made no remark upon them at the time, and my subsequent observation on that day gave me some sort of clue to their meaning.

I had heard from him that, during my absence, his niece had been much more with him : he had naturally missed his only companion, and one so loved and doated on ; and, after passing several days of solitude in his study, it had occurred to him that he would ask Agnes to join him sometimes there, and in his rides and walks, not with the slightest idea that her society could be any compensation for the loss of mine, but merely in the hope that it might serve to wile away some of his lonely hours, and in part cause him to forget the blank I had left behind me. The time that Agnes could spare from her aunt was therefore chiefly passed with her uncle, who had become really attached to her, and had grown in a manner dependent on her for those small womanly attentions in which, even towards him, I had been somewhat deficient. Then came Arthur Mildmay, but still my father liked to have Agnes beside him ; and now his affection for her had evidently reached a height which it was gall and wormwood to my jealous nature to behold. The better and kinder feelings which I had brought home with me, faded rapidly away beneath the blighting influence of envy and discontent. I had left a scene in which I had been surrounded by admirers, always first wherever I went ; and I returned to a father, who, though he loved me as deeply and fondly as ever, now looked to another besides myself ; and to a mother who, from my own neglectful conduct, had long ceased to entertain any affection for me, beyond that proceeding from the instinctive and ineffaceable feeling with which a parent must always regard a child.

I saw it all, yet I believed it to be too late to alter my ways ; and, instead of endeavouring to do so, I contented myself with loving my father with the tormenting love of jealousy, remaining indifferent to my mother, and hating Agnes. Yes, I hated her ! I hated one whose life was as that of a good spirit, shedding her soft beams on the path she trod ; one, to whose nature an evil or revengeful thought

was unknown ; one, too, whose virtues were not rendered odious by the slightest obtrusiveness or ostentation.

This change in me took place in the course of a single day ; but its effects upon herself and me will cease only with our lives. So is it with many a so-called trifling action, or train of feeling, even of the most insignificant of us ; nay, even a few words hastily uttered, and perhaps deeply repented of afterwards, may change the whole current of our own and other's existence. How often since have I experienced the truth of this, and reflected in bitter anguish and remorse upon that which, once said or done, could never be recalled ! God in His infinite mercy may have blotted my sins out of His book ; Agnes herself may have forgiven me ; but the evil deeds I have done, the jealous and vindictive temper I have nurtured, yet stand to bear witness against me in my own eyes, and those of my fellow-creatures. *They* cannot know the depth of my misery, the reality of my repentance ; and *I* cannot be assured, with all the fulness for which my sinking heart yearns, that God will hearken to the prayers of one who has neglected Him in the day of her prosperity, and has only turned to Him as her soul's last refuge, when mental and bodily agony have all but overwhelmed her.

Oh ! think of these things, you that are young and light-hearted, and rejoicing in the plenitude of your riches, and the might of your talents ; remember, ere it be too late, that you may be stretched upon an early deathbed, when the recollections "of a well-spent hour" will outweigh all the splendours and all the visions of earthly happiness, which are so rapidly passing from you. If, like me, you have few of these hours to look back upon, few proofs to assure yourself and others that your life has been one of faith in your Saviour, and love towards your brethren as His children—then indeed will you be most miserable, and your situation most pitiable ; better only than that of him who continues to the last hardened and insensible, and dies, as he has lived, without hope or fear beyond the grave.

But I am anticipating.

Arthur Mildmay returned to the Hall the evening of the day after Agnes's rejection of Henry Mordaunt. I will not attempt any lengthened description of Captain Mildmay, as I might hardly be an impartial judge of one with whom my lot in life has been so closely connected. He was tall,

handsome, distinguished-looking, and intelligent in his conversation. He had been educated at Eton, and had kept two or three terms at Christ Church, while waiting for a commission in the Guards. He was not rich, his patrimonial fortune being less than a thousand a-year. With a fine disposition, and no lack of talent, he had nevertheless run a reckless course of gaiety and dissipation since he came of age, as he had confessed to my father during their *tele-a-tele* conversations of the last few weeks.

Agnes and I were the sole occupants of the drawing-room when Arthur entered by the window from the garden; he had ridden first to the stables, where he had left his horse, and his approach was noiseless over the soft lawn. His fine countenance was beaming with animation and delight; and, not seeming to be aware of my presence, he advanced towards Agnes with extended hand. She started, and coloured deeply; but, recovering herself, she greeted him kindly, and turned to introduce him to me. Shaking hands with the greatest cordiality, he expressed the pleasure he felt at our becoming at last known to each other.

"Though I could not look upon you as a stranger, even before this meeting," he added, "and now I feel as if I were speaking to an old friend."

I answered him in my most gracious tones, and was as completely fascinated by the charm of his manner, as I had previously been by his bearing and appearance. He then addressed Agnes, inquiring for her uncle and aunt, and how she herself had been passing the last few days. The first dinner-bell had rung, and I hastened to prepare for that repast. As I went out of the room, I looked behind me for a moment; and, to my wonderment, I saw Arthur Mildmay leaning over the back of the chair which Agnes had not yet quitted, and whispering in her ear. I did not in the least suspect the real truth; but I was astonished, and rather displeased, that Arthur should be on such intimate terms with my cousin; and I was offended at what I chose to consider her presumption in having thus drawn him on.

This evening I stooped to the arts of the vainest of my sex. I attired myself with more than usual care in a most becoming dress, and even surveyed myself for some minutes in the glass before I descended to the drawing-room. When I entered, I was repaid by a look of admiration from Arthur,

who rose to place a chair for me near the open window, into which were streaming the rays of a magnificent declining sun. Arthur was talking to my mother, who appeared thoroughly to appreciate his kind attentive manner, and evident desire to please her, and contribute in any way to her comfort. My father and Agnes soon joined us, the latter looking to greater advantage than I had ever seen her, except, perhaps, on the first evening of my return, before sadness had been brought back upon her heart, and shown itself in her countenance—that sadness produced by my evil temper, and the dislike I took no trouble to conceal.

I have said that my credulity was severely taxed by Henry Mordaunt's love for Agnes, and by the hold she had acquired over the affections of my father; but it was now doomed to a still harder trial. Agnes had not been in the room for a minute before Arthur quitted my side for hers; and, throughout the evening, his manner towards her was most unmistakeably that of a lover to the object of his attachment. Not but that he showed great pleasure in my society, and evidently liked and admired me; but his heart, even to my reluctant conviction, was more than half given to Agnes. Nor could I doubt her affection for him; through her natural shyness it beamed forth in every expression of her eyes, in every tone of her voice. No wonder that she had refused Henry Mordaunt! no wonder that her face was radiant with happiness! She seemed fated to stand between me and every object I most desired to preserve or attain. I retired to rest that night with the firm resolve, that, cost what it might, Arthur Mildmay should be mine! yes, mine with his own free-will; and more, with his own earnest desire, and with the exclusive devotion of his heart. I knew that the hauteur of my disposition and manner would maintain my dignity, and prevent me from lowering myself in his eyes or my own; and beyond this I cared little or nothing. I excused my conduct towards Agnes, by assuring myself that she could not love him as I should love him, and would soon be consoled for his loss; and, moreover, that whatever her wishes or feelings might be, she was so utterly unworthy of him, that, in the end, it would be best for all parties that he had been saved from allying himself with one so inferior to him.

I laid awake for some hours, endeavouring to steel my

THE HEIRESS OF VERNON HALL.

CHAPTER VI.

On my way from my own room towards a glass door, leading through the conservatory into the garden, I encountered the old housekeeper, Mrs. Mivart. This lady was by no means free from the stateliness and formality belonging to her class, especially to those members of it whose lives have been passed in an ancient mansion, tenanted by a proud old family. She adored my father, and every body and every thing connected with the Vernons, or with Vernon Hall. She was about forty at the time of my aunt's elopement with Mr. Bray; and it was reported among the old servants and neighbours, that the occasional smile which had flitted over her countenance before that event took place, had then fled from it, to revisit it no more. Mrs. Bray had been the old woman's delight as a child; and, as she gradually sprang up into the lovely girl, Mrs. Mivart's affection for her strengthened from day to day. It assumed the character of an exclusive devotedness when my grandfather married again, and my aunt became the victim of those persecutions from the hands of her stepmother, which eventually drove her to seek another home. When her brother was absent from the Hall, Agnes Vernon looked to Mrs. Mivart as her only friend, and poured into her sympathizing ear the details of all the daily trials and annoyances to which she was subjected. Lady Vernon suspected this, and knew that the old woman had little love for her; but Mrs. Mivart was always so respectful and guarded in her manner, that her mistress could not construe her distant, cold civility, into a plea for requiring her husband to dismiss her. Indeed, notwithstanding the almost unbounded power she exercised over him, she had little hope of finding him otherwise than inflexible on this point; for many years before, when the house had been on

fire, Mrs. Mivart, then an inferior servant in the establishment, had darted through smoke and flames to the room, where still slumbered her unconscious master and his first wife, and had preserved their lives at the greatest risk to her own, and at the cost of several severe injuries, the scars of which had remained as a perpetual memento of her disinterested courage. But Lady Vernon well knew the weakness of her husband's character, and the indomitable firmness of her own; and her constant principle was never to despair of effecting any object of her desire.

One day, when my aunt had ventured to disobey her in some trifling particular, her stepmother, after employing the most insulting language towards her, commanded her to retire to her own room, which she was not to quit on any pretext until she received permission to do so; adding, that any attempt at disobedience would be punished by her being locked in, and dieted upon bread and water. It is most probable that the wily Lady Vernon forbore to confine her at once, that she might first give her both the chance and the inducement to escape, in the hope that the temptation might be too strong for her, and that she might be thus rid of one whose presence was a constant torment to her.

Agnes's father and brother were both absent on a visit of a few days at a house in the neighbourhood; she was forbidden to see Mrs. Mivart until the time of her durance should have expired; and the unhappy girl, goaded almost to madness by this climax of the cruelty she had endured for the last year and a half, immediately wrote a note to Mr. Bray, declaring herself willing to yield to the wishes he had frequently expressed, when attending at the Hall during the last six months, and to fly with him she loved, from the insupportable wretchedness of her present life. When she had finished writing, she rang her bell, and desired the servant who answered it to have that note conveyed instantly to Mr. Bray. Had she been ten minutes later, her plan would have been foiled; for it was afterwards discovered that Lady Vernon had quickly given orders that only her own maid should answer Miss Vernon's bell, and that all requests on the part of the latter were to be brought to her for her sanction before they were complied with. Misery had, however, taught Agnes some degree of cunning, or, rather, had made her suspicious; and, fearing lest any

delay might occasion the overthrow of her designs, she had told the servant not to wait for a reply to her note, and in it she had appointed Mr. Bray to meet her at the park-gate nearest to the village at eight o'clock that evening, knowing that at that hour her stepmother would be reposing in her boudoir at the other side of the house, with her maid in attendance upon her. A complete suit of clothes, which Agnes had purchased for a poor girl, had been brought that morning into her room by Mrs. Mivart; and in these Agnes resolved to disguise herself. She hastily put up a small bundle of necessary articles, with two ornaments of inestimable value to her; one, a locket, richly set with precious stones, containing the likeness of her mother; the other, an exceedingly beautiful brooch given her by her brother on her last birthday. These, with a diamond and a pearl ring on her finger, and a single sovereign in her purse (for Lady Vernon took care to regulate her allowance with a due regard to economy), comprised the whole of my aunt's possessions when she left that home which she was destined to behold no more.

It was the middle of October, and a dark, foggy evening favoured the secrecy of her escape. She reached the park-gate without exciting the least curiosity or observation; there she stood for one moment; and, as she probably reflected that she was leaving it for the last time, she gave way to a passionate burst of tears, and leant for support against one of the columns of the lodge. Just then the door was opened, and the wife of the gardener who inhabited it looked out, endeavouring to discern through the surrounding gloom the figure of her little boy, whom she had sent on an errand to Leyton, and who had not yet returned. She started back on seeing the motionless form of Agnes in the attitude we have described. The deep tones of the Hall clock were now striking the hour of eight. Agnes roused herself; and declining, with many thanks, the good woman's offer of walking in and resting herself, and "taking a drop of something, for she looked so pale and ill," she passed out through the gate into the public road, at the nearest angle of which Mr. Bray was waiting for her. She hastily walked on, and was lifted by him into his gig. Beyond this, which had been seen by the gardener's wife, and reported to Mrs. Mivart (from whom I had all these details), nothing was

known of my aunt's flight or proceedings until, about three weeks after, her father received a letter from her imploring his blessing, and his forgiveness for the rash and undutiful act she had committed ; and urging, as some palliation of her error, the sufferings she had undergone, and her deep affection for him who was now her husband.

My grandfather had never been fully aware of the treatment his unfortunate daughter had experienced from his wife ; for the latter, who, like so many other persons, combined in her character the apparently conflicting qualities of fierceness and duplicity, had always professed the greatest solicitude for her stepdaughter's welfare, and her grief that Agnes was evidently so prepossessed against her, as to resist all her efforts to establish their intercourse upon a more familiar and cordial footing. Before Sir Richard and his son, she treated Agnes with politeness, and even with a show of kindness ; and this conduct so provoked my aunt, who clearly saw through it, that she was sometimes tempted to make a hasty reply, thereby incurring a severe reproof from her father, and a look of mild reproach from his wife. Even her brother was not fully alive to the extent of his sister's injuries ; for, though he had no love for his step-mother, she was universally civil to him, from motives of policy, and he could not help thinking that Agnes might have managed better. His frequent and prolonged absences from home, too, joined to an abstracted disposition, precluded him from knowing, or observing accurately, the true state of affairs at Vernon Hall.

Lady Vernon had, as Mrs. Mivart was convinced, often tried to insinuate to her husband, that his daughter was entirely under the influence of the housekeeper, and by her was prejudiced against her father's wife. Now, she seized upon this opportunity to impress triumphantly upon him, that Agnes's elopement must have been connived at, and even planned and instigated, by Mrs. Mivart, as it was impossible a young girl of eighteen, so carefully watched and guarded, could have concerted and carried out such a scheme, alone and unaided. My grandfather had but small powers of understanding any argument, still less of opposing it by any of his own, so he generally took for granted what his wife told him ; and on this occasion, when his pride was stung to the very quick, and his usually sluggish tempera-

ment lashed into fury, he would probably have believed her, had she told him that Mrs. Mivart and his daughter had conspired to take away his life.

The bell was violently rung, and the housekeeper summoned. She appeared, her countenance betraying the conflicting emotions which were struggling within her, and endeavouring to restrain herself within the limits of that respect which she ever conceived it her duty to pay to her master and mistress. She found the former pacing up and down the room, his dull and heavy features distended, and flushed with rage and mortification. Lady Vernon, with her cold glassy eye, and "cat-like face" (Mrs. Mivart's description of her), was seated in a chair, and feigning to be overcome with grief.

The housekeeper saluted them with her usual courtesy, and awaited in perfect silence what they might have to say to her. Lady Vernon seemed resolved not to be the first to speak, but looked significantly at her husband, who, as he watched the tears quietly stealing down the cheek of his faithful domestic, could not bring himself to believe that she had been privy to aught of dishonour to the house of Vernon.

"Mrs. Mivart," he said, "your mistress has, that is, *we* have sent for you to ask a few questions about Miss Vernon's elopement; not that I can really suppose"—

His wife now saw that it was high time to take the business in hand herself; so, addressing Mrs. Mivart in a decided but civil tone, she spoke as follows:—

"It is, as you may imagine, Mrs. Mivart, with the greatest reluctance, that your master and I have admitted an idea of the possibility of your having any part in this late most grievous and disastrous event; but we can no longer shut our eyes to the truth, and your best and wisest course will be to confess all, and throw yourself upon our mercy."

Mrs. Mivart drew herself up to her full height, brushed away her tears, and answered in a quiet tone of dignity—

"Madam, your ladyship's own conscience may best tell you who has been the cause of the event we deplore. To you, sir, what can I say? Is it possible that *you* could for one instant suspect me of any thing so base and foul?"

"Hear her insolence, Sir Richard," cried the lady, losing all command over herself; "is this conduct towards me to

go unpunished? Woman! you know that you have incited this unhappy and too yielding young lady to quit her father's roof; and, bad and degraded as she is, you have lent a helping hand towards her ruin."

"It is false, madam!" replied Mrs. Mivart, in her turn losing all self-control; "and you know it to be so. God forgive *you* for your unnatural cruelties towards the motherless daughter of your husband, and *her* for the disgrace and reproach which she has brought upon her father's name. Your conduct cannot justify her's; but God alone knows the bitterness of her trial. Her flight was only known to me at the same time that it was known to my master and your ladyship; and in this, and in all other things in which you have accused me, I solemnly declare myself innocent."

Lady Vernon heard her out to the end; and, turning to Sir Richard, she said in that quiet, decided way, which he was never able to resist—

"I think, Sir Richard, you will agree with me that it will be better to settle all accounts with Mrs. Mivart without loss of time, and then there will be nothing to prevent her quitting our service immediately."

Sir Richard was rather startled; but his wife proceeded—

"Of course, Mrs. Mivart, after this display of extreme insolence towards me, and brazen deceit towards us both, your remaining in this house an hour longer is not to be thought of; so you had better pack up your things directly, and tell one of the servants where you wish to have them forwarded."

Sir Richard was silent, though his countenance showed signs of discontent and uneasiness.

"Am I to understand this dismissal as coming from you, sir?" asked Mrs. Mivart.

Lady Vernon gave him a look which he could not misinterpret, and dared not disobey; and he answered hastily—

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Mivart, you see you can't stay; but I'm very sorry—very sorry indeed."

Mrs. Mivart turned to leave the room, and to conceal her emotion; she heard her master murmur as if to himself—

"She saved my life and *hers*, and *she* loved her, I know she did;" and, completely unnerved, she would not trust her voice to utter another word, but hastily left the room. The last she heard was her mistress saying—

"Impudent, hardened wretch ! she goes off without having the grace to say good-morning."

Exactly an hour afterwards, as Mrs. Mivart was standing at the back entrance, ready to depart, and waiting for the vehicle which was to convey her to the village to meet the coach, she saw her master beckoning to her from the courtyard. She had by this time regained the usual rigidity and stiffness of her manner, that manner which I had seen disturbed but once or twice during all the years of my remembrance. He, on the contrary, looked uneasy and annoyed. For once, his wife had subdued his will, but not his understanding ; and, for once, he was about to undertake something which he must ever keep concealed from her.

"Mrs. Mivart," he said, "I suppose you are going home to your own village?"

She bowed her assent, and he continued hurriedly—

"Well, well, that's at least two hundred miles off, so nobody need know any thing about it but you and I, and your young master. I intend to buy you a nice cottage there, and settle fifty pounds a-year upon you. That's all I wanted to say—good bye, Mrs. Mivart, good bye."

He shook her hand and left her. His promise was faithfully kept ; and there the old woman remained till the death of Lady Vernon, two years afterwards, when she received a note from her young master announcing the event, and telling her that his father was anxious to receive her back into his service. But, once dismissed, her pride would not allow her to return, and she sent a respectful and grateful, but decided refusal to the offer. Sir Richard did not survive his wife more than a twelvemonth, and then Mrs. Mivart re-entered the family as housekeeper to my father.

When first it had been proposed that my cousin Agnes should live at Vernon Hall, and be to me as a sister, her indignation had been great ; for, dearly as she had loved her late young mistress, she had never surmounted the bitter feeling excited by the remembrance of her voluntary degradation ; and the notion of the country practitioner's daughter becoming our inmate, and associating with me on a footing of equality, was scarcely less displeasing to her than to myself.

When she first saw Agnes, the likeness to her mother struck her so forcibly, that her heart for a time was softened

towards her ; but her strong partiality for me, and a look of Agnes which reminded her of Mr. Bray, soon turned the current of her feelings back into its natural channel, and she repelled with a cold civility all my cousin's attempts to convince her of the gratitude she felt towards her for the kindness she had formerly shown to her mother. By degrees, some of this asperity melted away beneath the influence of Agnes's gentle, unassuming manner ; but Mrs. Mivart still retained a lively sense of her immeasurable inferiority to myself, both in position, and in personal attractions.

When I met Mrs. Mivart at the door of the conservatory on the morning above mentioned, I could see directly, by the increased sternness of her countenance, that something had occurred to ruffle her ; but as I had no great curiosity on the subject, I merely said, "Good-morning, Mrs. Mivart !" and was passing on into the garden, when she stopped me by saying in her harshest tones—

"I don't think you're much wanted out there, Miss Caroline. You'll be one too many, I assure you, if you go and interrupt their philandering."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Mivart ?" I asked haughtily. "That I am an intruder in my father's own grounds ?"

"Oh ! I mean nothing," returned the privileged housekeeper, "except that there's likely to be a wedding at the Hall before Miss Vernon's—that's all."

"Nonsense !" I answered ; "but, pray, if that is the case, who are to be the happy pair ?"

"Oh, miss, as to that, 'nonsense' means nothing ; and what should an old woman like me know about such things, or about any thing, indeed ? Time was—but never mind."

I saw that I had fanned the already rising flame, so I added, soothingly—

"Why, Mrs. Mivart, you are never going to be angry with your own young lady ? Come, tell me all you have discovered."

I must here observe that Mrs. Mivart possessed a large share of that intuitive knowledge of the plans and intentions of the family, which is commonly found to exist in old and favourite servants ; she had quickly divined that the union of Arthur Mildmay and myself was an object very near to my father's heart ; and as General Mildmay had been one of her greatest favourites, and his son had soon become an

equal one, she highly approved of the alliance, and indeed desired it little less ardently than her master. This will afford a clue to the speech she now gave utterance to.

"Angry with you, Miss Caroline," she said, "no! that's not very likely, I think; but, before you've passed another day here, you may see cause for being angry, too. I knew that nothing but evil could ever come from having any thing to do with the child of that accursed marriage, and now it's proved that I'm right. Mark my words, Miss Caroline. Captain Mildmay ought to be the husband of Miss Vernon; but, unless something is done quickly to prevent it, as sure as I stand here he will be the husband of Miss Bray."

"Nay, Mrs. Mivart," I said, colouring at this corroboration of my own suspicions, but endeavouring to speak with entire composure; "nay, I think you must be mistaken. Captain Mildmay may have been polite, and even kind, to Agnes, as it seems his nature to be to all; but, believe me, he will never marry her."

"Well! I trust it may be so," rejoined she; "but my master and mistress are quite blind to it all, and that has made the danger much greater for him. What else should have kept him down here in the country week after week? You away; no sporting in June and July. Old folks are not quite so easily deceived, Miss Vernon; though, I own, it was long before I could bring myself to believe it possible. Just look there!" she added, pointing to a winding path in the shrubbery, the turns of which rendered parts of it visible from the house.

I looked in the direction she indicated, and saw Arthur and Agnes gently strolling along, her arm in his, and evidently quite unconscious that they were observed. I felt myself grow paler, and quiver with passion; but Mrs. Mivart's eyes were upon me, and I commanded myself. Without another word, I walked slowly through the conservatory, and went out at the opposite door. I heard her murmur, half to herself, but doubtless with the intention that I should hear, "Ah, she sees it now. Young Mr. Mordaunt has not been here for some days—I suppose he's beginning to know he has a rival."

I will not weary the reader with another description of the state of my feelings as I paced rapidly towards the shrubbery; suffice it to say that, at that moment, they were

more those of a fiend than a human being. I did not meet the pair, for they returned to the house by another path.

Our whole party met at the breakfast-table, where I exerted all my powers of pleasing, and did not give the least hint of my knowledge of the morning walk. My behaviour to Agnes throughout that day, and many succeeding ones, was more kind and considerate than was my wont; for I soon saw that no point could be carried with Arthur by violence, and indeed, as time went on, I was not wholly free from compunction for the pain I was doing my best to inflict upon her.

For some days my conquest appeared doubtful; Arthur continued his attentions to Agnes, though his thoughts and his admiration seemed concentrated on myself. A week had not elapsed before I became most fondly attached to him, notwithstanding the air of constraint, and even of profound melancholy, which often obscured his naturally joyous manner. This did not diminish even with the progress of his love for me, but rather increased and deepened in consequence of it. I was at a loss to what cause to attribute this, as I could scarcely believe that the decay of a passing fancy for Agnes could produce such uneasiness as was too often visible on his countenance, and in his abstracted deportment.

Arthur had expressed himself passionately fond of music; Agnes was no performer; I sang to and with him, learned his favourite songs, and procured his favourite pieces. Nearly a month passed away; and still, though it was my smile that he now sought, my glance that he strove to meet, and my society that was his delight, yet he was ever attentive to Agnes, and most thoughtful of her in all ways, always asking her before me whether we should ride or walk; what book he should read to us; and all those questions which a lover naturally puts first to his mistress. But, after the first week, Agnes generally made some excuse for remaining at home with her aunt, and allowed Arthur to accompany my father and me, and sometimes myself only, in our excursions through the varied, beautiful scenery in which our neighbourhood abounded.

And, day by day, I saw Agnes's cheek grow pale, her eyes dim, and her step slow and languid. The bright look had departed; and now, if her countenance lighted up for a moment, it was with the wan and ghastly smile of a broken

heart. Yes, her heart was breaking ; for she had loved, not with the childish romance of a girl's fancy, but with the full, deep fervour of a woman's love. Nor, as I was soon after reluctantly convinced, had she given her affection unsought, nor had it been lightly won ; and now she struggled hard, first to conceal, and then to overcome it. Truly,

" She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek ; she pined in thought ;
And, with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed ? "

At the end of the time I have mentioned, Arthur could not always hide his feelings towards me, though he endeavoured to do so. A look, an expression, would escape him, which revealed, not to me only, the real object of his affection. Still, he never spoke of love ; sometimes he studiously avoided being left alone with me ; at others, he would seek my company as I sat reading on the lawn, or practising our songs in the music-room. My father always seemed pleased to find us together, and warmly pressed Arthur to remain with us during the early part of the shooting season, which was rapidly approaching.

One morning, towards the end of August, while the aspect of affairs was in this uncertain state, I received a letter from Miss Sutherland, dated from Brighton, where she and her family were staying. At the conclusion of this letter, which was a most affectionate one, she said—

" I half hoped, my dear Caroline, that you would have written to me before now. When you do give me the pleasure of a sight of your handwriting (and pray let that be very soon), tell me if Arthur Mildmay is still with you, as, from what Lord Tintern says, I suppose him to be. I should also like to know if he was pleased with my little remembrance."

This recalled to my mind the ring with which she had intrusted me, and which till that instant I had completely forgotten, so entirely had my mind been occupied and engrossed by other things.

After breakfast, when Arthur came in to sing with me, I put Augusta's letter into his hands, saying—

"Read this, Arthur ; it is from your old friend, Miss Sutherland. I do not know how to ask your forgiveness for my inexcusable neglect, but I must throw myself on your mercy."

At the same time I presented him with Augusta's little packet. He read her note to me ; and, unfolding the case, he found another, addressed to himself. I narrowly watched his countenance as he perused it, but could not detect the slightest change of expression till he came nearly to the end, when the colour rose in his cheek. He gave it to me when he had finished it ; and examining the ring, which was simple and elegant, he remarked—

"It is extremely kind of her, and I must write and tell her that I shall have great pleasure in wearing it as a token of her friendship ; though, as to the gratitude she talks about, that of course is all stuff."

Her note was as follows :—

"LONDON, July —, 18—.

"MY DEAR ARTHUR—The remembrance of our childish friendship emboldens me to beg your acceptance of this little ring, containing a lock of my hair. It is a very *very* slight mark of the deep gratitude that reigns in my heart, and must ever continue to do so, while memory is spared me to recall that scene of terror and anguish on my part, and of courage and presence of mind on yours. I well know that you would shrink from the idea of being praised for a noble action, one out of many with which your life has abounded ; but I cannot resist the strong desire that possesses me, to assure you of my deep and lasting sense of what I owe to the preserver of my existence.

"You will soon hear of my engagement to Lord Tintern, and I am sure I shall have your sincere congratulations upon my happiness. You will think, too, that I have the best guarantee for that happiness in the high character of my future husband, and in his ardent attachment to myself, of this I am well aware ; and every feeling of affection and esteem which I have to bestow, is his.

"You are now in a house which, by the time you receive this note, will probably be in your eyes as a palace of enchanted delight ; for beauty will be smiling upon you, and a power of attraction, even beyond that of mere external loveliness, will be exerting its influence upon you. You will

scarcely escape heart-whole from such fascination, which even I, as a woman, have learnt to love.

"Whatever be your lot in life, my dear Arthur, be assured of the warmest wishes of—Your affectionate friend,

"AUGUSTA SUTHERLAND."

I could but ill conceal the emotion these last words caused me, as I folded the note and returned it to Arthur. As he took it from me, our eyes met; and, oh! what a world of affection beamed from his, as, for a minute, he kept them fixed upon my face.

"Caroline!" he said, in a voice half-choked with the conflict within. "Caroline! I am the most miserable of men. I love you with all the power of my soul, with all the devotion of my heart—and my word, my faith, is pledged to another."

He turned from me, and groaned aloud.

Surprise and horror at first deprived me of all capability of speech; and, as he construed my silence into displeasure at his venturing to make so strange an avowal, he came nearer to me, and gazed on me mournfully, without uttering another word. This was more than I could bear.

Every feeling of pride or dignity gave way in an instant; and, bursting into a passionate flood of tears (the first I had shed for years, for I was not given to the melting mood), I exclaimed—

"Oh! Arthur, Arthur! Why do you thus torture me? You cannot doubt my love for you; it is as deep, perhaps deeper, than your own. But, oh! recall those dreadful words; tell me that you are not another's; tell me that you are *mine*—mine only—mine for ever!"

There was no acting in this outburst; it came from the very depths of my ungoverned heart, and pierced his own to the inmost core. His countenance was fearfully agitated, but he sat down by me; and my hand was clasped in his, and his arm encircled me, and my head rested on his shoulder.

For the time I was conscious only of a sensation of unutterable happiness: all, all had passed away, save the blessed conviction that I loved and was beloved. He was the first to remind me that there was a barrier between us. Suddenly rising, he retreated a few paces from me, and said, in as firm a tone as he could command—

"Caroline! this must not be. Every tie of honour binds me to Agnes, whom I thought I loved till I saw you, and then I had gone too far to retract. Doubting my own resolution even after passing one evening with you, the very next morning I engaged myself to her, begging her not to mention what had passed between us for a few weeks. This delay, which was prompted, alas! by my secret disinclination to make Agnes my wife, has proved fatal to us all. There is no remedy; Agnes loves me with all her heart, and I dare not trifle with such a heart, even were I not bound by my own word to her."

"And for me!" I exclaimed. "Oh, Arthur! you care nothing for my sufferings—for my peace of mind, wrecked for ever!"

He answered—"I well know that I deserve all the reproaches you can heap upon me; for not even the misery they inflict, not even the sacrifice of your affection, can atone for the wicked, selfish part I have been acting. But you, Miss Vernon, who are the very soul of truth and honour—you would be the last to tempt me to break so solemn an engagement to another."

"If Agnes has one spark of womanly pride about her," I said, "she will herself release you from it, when she sees, as she must see, how distasteful it has become to you."

As I pronounced these last words, the door opened, and Agnes herself entered the room. Her face was very pale, and the traces of recent agitation were upon it.

"I am very sorry to interrupt your singing, Caroline," said she, in a low tone; "but I am extremely anxious to say a few words to Captain Mildmay, and for some days I have vainly sought an opportunity of speaking to him in private."

He was about to follow her, but I exclaimed—

"Nay! I am going up-stairs, so your secret conference may take place here."

I left the room, rejoicing at the probability I now saw of Arthur's escape. I went to my father's studio; he was out, and I had undisturbed possession of it. In about ten minutes' time I heard the opposite door opened and shut, and a quick, light step ascending the stairs. A moment afterwards, and Arthur was in the study. He clasped me in his arms, and called me his own till death.

We were both too much overcome to speak at first. At

length he found voice to tell me that he was released with honour to himself, by the express desire of Agnes, and that no obstacle now remained to oppose our union.

"Agnes has acted nobly," he said, "like herself; and even now, in the full triumph of my happiness, I cannot but grieve to think I have trifled with her's."

"Do not let that distress you too much, dearest Arthur," I replied. "Agnes loves you now, I am sure, as who would not? but her's is one of those cold, gentle natures, on which sorrow has no lasting power; and I am convinced that, though it must cost her a momentary pang, the course she has adopted will be best for herself in the end. How could she have been a happy wife, knowing her husband's heart to be given to another?"

"I trust it is as you say, dearest," he rejoined; "Agnes's goodness and sweetness of temper, seem to me, if possible, greater than ever; but now I marvel how I could have mistaken the feeling I had towards her for real, true love. But she is indeed suffering very much at present, dear Caroline, and I know you will do all in your power to soothe and console her."

"Really," I answered, with all my native haughtiness, "I think it is a little too much to expect from me, that I am to set about comforting your discarded mistress. I should have thought you might have felt gratified to see, that my knowledge of your previous fancy for her has not lessened my love for you."

Arthur looked hurt and mortified, and made no reply; so, after a pause, I added more gently—

"Dear Arthur! this is rather early for you to frown upon me. It augurs ill for future days—does it not?"

Arthur was melted in an instant; he begged my forgiveness, and said his feelings had been so wrought upon and excited that morning, that he was scarcely master of his words.

After a short time spent in lovers' talk, I asked him to give me an account of his scene with my cousin, to whom I promised to be all kindness.

When they were left together, an embarrassing silence ensued; it was broken by Agnes, who, with a firmness which astonished Arthur, thus addressed him—

"I have sought you, Captain Mildmay, for the purpose of

setting you free from your engagement to me. For the last three weeks the truth has been gradually forcing itself upon my mind, that you have ceased to love me. Here are the few ornaments I accepted from you before I could bring myself to believe that it was really so ; and now, I have only to pray that God will bless you and my cousin. I do not wonder at your affection for her ; but one thing I must say, Arthur, that she can never love you more deeply or more truly than I have. Farewell !”

Her voice faltered, and she turned to leave the room. Arthur could not suffer her thus to depart ; springing forward, he caught her hand, saying—

“Stay for one instant, Agnes, I implore you. Do not leave me, thinking of me only as a heartless villain ! I have erred, I fear, past an angel’s forgiveness ; but, Agnes, if any woman could forgive, surely it is your own gentle self. Again I vow that my whole life shall be devoted to your happiness, if you will accept my hand. Already our faith is plighted, and we will go far away hence, where there will be nothing to disturb our peace.”

At these words the colour rose in Agnes’s face, and overspread her whole neck, as she answered proudly—

“Arthur, this is too much ! Do not add insult to the injury you have already inflicted on me. Not one word of reproach should ever have passed my lips, for your involuntary error in transferring your affection from a plain unattractive girl, to one so beautiful and attractive ; but, though I am a poor orphan, and dependent on my uncle and aunt’s kindness, yet I have the heart of a woman beating in my breast—a heart that would never stoop to the baseness of marrying a man who loves another. I believed that you had known me better. If such is your opinion of me, I do indeed wonder that you could ever have wasted a thought on me.” Then, resuming her wonted calmness, she added, “I have said all I wished, Captain Mildmay, and I need detain you no longer.”

“Give me one word more, Agnes,” he cried ; “for without it I can never be happy. That word is *forgiveness* ; can you, will you extend it to me ?”

“From the very bottom of my heart,” she replied earnestly, “I forgive you the very little I have to forgive.”

She went to the door, but her hand trembled so that she

Emily Mordaunt, the eldest child, was a fine-looking young woman of about four-and-twenty ; then came Henry ; and then Emma, a girl of twenty, without any pretensions to beauty beyond what are conferred by a pair of bright intelligent eyes, but lively in her manner, and amusing in her conversation. All were good, amiable, and unselfish, and their popularity was scarcely greater among their poor than their rich neighbours.

When dinner was announced, I was allotted to Captain Spencer, Arthur to a Miss Bateman, a young lady whose mental powers were by no means remarkable, or remarkable only as showing how great a degree of natural inability may exist in a person without entitling any one to call him or her deficient. Miss Bateman was seventeen, rather good-looking, and the heiress of about a thousand a-year ; so there was little fear that her craving propensity for admirers would remain long unsatisfied.

Mrs. Bateman, who was seated next to Mr. Mordaunt, began talking to him on different local subjects ; but after a short time he seemed to wish to give the conversation a tone of more general interest, and inquired of me whether the approaching race ball at ——— was likely to be well attended. Before I could reply, Miss Bateman cried out, in a tone of childish ecstasy—

“Oh dear ! yes, Mr. Mordaunt ; indeed, I hope so ; I doat upon dancing ; don't you, Captain Mildmay ?”

“I don't know,” he answered ; “it depends upon circumstances.”

“Captain Mildmay is wishing to say, Miss Bateman, if he dared,” said Henry Mordaunt, “that his enjoyment of dancing depends upon his partner ; but, you see, he could not summon up courage to pay such a compliment.”

Arthur laughed, and Miss Bateman giggled, as she said—

“La ! Mr. Mordaunt, what a quiz you are ! I shall be quite afraid of opening my mouth before you soon.”

“What a blessed consummation that would be !” was Captain Spencer's aside to me.

Mrs. Fitzmaurice, a young widow, who had fallen to Henry's share, observed—

“Well, I confess I have lost none of my youthful taste for dancing ; and, indeed, poor dear Captain Fitzmaurice was so fond of balls, that I should feel it a sort of treason to his

memory were I to relinquish them, as sometimes I am disposed to do."

Here she lifted her transparent pocket-handkerchief to her eyes. The poor dear captain had been dead about a twelvemonth.

"My dear Mrs. Fitzmaurice," said Captain Spencer to her in a low tone, for she was his other neighbour, "indeed you do not act fairly by yourself, or by others who are longing to win a smile from you. You really must not allow your grief, though it renders you so interesting in the eyes of us all, to overcome you so completely at this distant period of time."

He glanced, as he spoke, at the white roses in her hair, and the rest of her elegant half-mourning attire.

"Indeed, Captain Spencer," she answered in a pathetic voice, "I do try hard to struggle with my feelings, and, at all events, to avoid any display of them, which I should so detest; but there are moments when the heart seems full to bursting. I often think of those beautiful lines—

"By those that deepest feel, is ill express'd
The indistinctness of the suffering breast;
No words suffice the secret soul to show,
For truth denies all eloquence to woe."

This was repeated in a drawling manner, accompanied by a slight lisp, and was, of course, highly effective.

I heard Captain Spencer whisper—

"Who would not envy Captain Fitzmaurice, even in death, to have been the beloved of such a wife?"

The lady turned aside, and, had her rouge permitted it, no doubt a blush had been visible.

"What a love Moore is, to be sure!" said Miss Bateman, appealing to Arthur; "but in my opinion he has written far more beautiful lines than those Mrs. Fitzmaurice has just quoted."

Arthur seemed not to hear what she said, or, at all events, did not think it worth while to set her right on the subject of their authorship. Miss Bateman continued—

"Do you remember that sweet poem of his, Captain Mildmay, in defence of dancing? I don't exactly remember it; but I was so pleased with it, that at one time I always used to read it of an evening before I went to dress for a ball."

"What can she mean?" I asked Captain Spencer. "I

never heard of any poem written by Moore in defence of dancing."

"I suppose," he replied, "that her wise head is running upon those lines in 'Lara:'"

'The long carousal shakes th' illumined hall;
Well speeds alike the banquet and the ball:
And the gay dance of bounding beauty's train,
Links grace and harmony in happiest chain.
Blest are the early hearts and gentle hands
That mingle there in well-according bands;
It is a sight the careful brow might smooth,
And make age smile, and dream itself to youth,
And youth forget such hours were past on earth:
So springs the exulting bosom to that mirth!'"

"That's the very thing, Captain Spencer," said Miss Bateman; "but talking of dancing somehow reminds me of the Epsom races. Do you know, I won so many pairs of gloves of the gentlemen, that they vowed they would never bet with me again. But I shall make them, though; wouldn't you, if you were me, Miss Mordaunt?" addressing Emma; and, without waiting for an answer, she added—

"All the gentlemen said I must be very clever, always to fix upon the winning horse. I wonder they would go on saying so, for I kept telling them all how I hated to hear myself praised; but they said I had better get accustomed to it, as I was sure to meet with it all my life. Were you ever at any races, Miss Vernon?"

"Yes," I replied, "I was at Ascot this year."

"And did you bet?" continued Miss Bateman, who since her visit to Epsom had affected the sporting style, and imagined herself *fast*.

"I hardly remember now," I replied; "but I think I won a pair of gloves of you, Captain Spencer, did I not?"

"Yes," he answered, "I believe you did."

"Captain Fitzmaurice would never allow me to bet," observed the widow; "he said it was not ladylike."

This was invented for the occasion, as all saw except Miss Bateman, who remarked indignantly—

"I rather think Captain Fitzmaurice was mistaken there, Mrs. Fitzmaurice. Lord Lowndes told me that all his sisters had a great many wagers upon the Derby, and the Oaks also; and I know for a fact, on the best authority, that Lady Clairville bets every where, and very high, too."

There was no answering this triumphant refutation of the deceased captain's opinion, and there was silence for a few moments. It was broken by an elderly lady, a Miss Norris, who took occasion to observe, somewhat sternly, upon the frivolity of young people of the present day, as compared with her own—

"When I was young," she said, addressing the company at large, with a side look at Miss Bateman; "when I was young, girls were very differently brought up to what they are now, and boys were not allowed to prattle such nonsense to them. *Then*, young ladies were taught to read their Bible, to show respect to their parents and elders, and to darn their own stockings; *now*, they read religious novels, talk louder than their fathers and mothers, and think of nothing but dressing, and flirting, and vanity. Some people may think such changes very fine; but, for my part, I'm a bigoted old woman, and should like to see the good old days back again."

There was a general smile at this outburst from the old lady, who could no longer contain her impatience at Miss Bateman's folly, and was obliged to make a pretence of veiling her meaning in generalities to avoid being personally rude. Miss Bateman took refuge in her vacant stare, and in the observation she usually made when any remark was beyond her comprehension, which was certainly the case on the present occasion.

"La! what a quiz Miss Norris is!"

"Come, Miss Norris," said Mr. Mordaunt, good-humouredly; "you must recollect that our age has degenerated in many respects, and make some allowance for the follies of my daughters and their young companions. Let me have the pleasure of taking a glass of wine with you; that is a good old-fashioned custom, at all events."

Miss Norris graciously complied; and Mrs. Fitzmaurice took advantage of a temporary pause to say—

"What a glorious sunset! look at the rich golden beams of light pouring into the room. It really reminds one of a landscape of Claude Lorraine. Ah! Captain Spencer, who would be immersed in cities if all had hearts to feel a scene like this?"

Captain Spencer sighed an answering sigh, and repeated softly—

"Who indeed? Ah! Mrs. Fitzmaurice, a heart is a treasure we meet with but too seldom here below! And when we find it in a young and lovely woman, joined to every attribute of refined taste and graceful manner, then truly we seem for the time to be wafted into Paradise."

Mrs. Fitzmaurice looked down with another sigh; while Henry, who overheard the observation, could not help saying—

"Don't believe him, Mrs. Fitzmaurice; Spencer has often told me he was convinced there was no such thing to be found as a woman with a heart; and, if he could find one, he would be sure to set about breaking it forthwith, so I advise you to beware."

"A buried heart," replied the widow, "need little fear being again broken, even by the fascinations of Captain Spencer."

This was accompanied by a very bewitching glance; and Captain Spencer's answer did not reach my ear.

I looked at Arthur, who had appeared little inclined this evening for general conversation, and who was talking to Emma Mordaunt: I heard her say—

"How did you leave Miss Bray this afternoon, Captain Mildmay? She has been looking so pale and worn lately, that Emily and I have been quite anxious about her; but I hope she is not really ill."

This was said without the slightest suspicion of the truth; but the too-conscious Arthur evidently thought some meaning lay beneath her words.

"Miss Bray, I trust, will soon recover her usual health and spirits," he answered, in an apparently unconcerned voice. "I think she is too apt to overtax her strength in many ways; but I was not aware that she was labouring under any severe indisposition."

"I did not say she was," rejoined Emma, with some warmth; "but, if it were the case, I should hardly think that any one could have passed some weeks in the house with Agnes, and be indifferent to her sufferings, whether bodily or mental."

She stopped, seeing her brother's keen eye upon her, and knowing that he was listening to their conversation.

Miss Bateman, who had caught Emma's last words, and was tired of not hearing the sound of her own voice, here interposed—

"Sufferings, did you say Miss Mordaunt? Oh! it is a sad thing to be ill. Do you know, I was laid up a whole fortnight this spring in town, with a bad attack of influenza! and Doctor Bright came to see me twice. Lord Lowndes said I looked quite like a shadow when I first came downstairs again, and he wondered I was not complaining of weakness all day long."

"In my day," said Miss Norris, "young people did not suffer from illnesses with such grand names to them; and when every thing was being done for them that they could possibly want, it would have been thought rather strange if they had complained."

"Oh! as to that," replied Miss Bateman, "every body told me how patient I was. Mr. Treadgold, the doctor, said he was attending several other young ladies at the same time, and some of them grumbled so. He told them how bad I was, and how I always took all my medicine, and said so little about it; but they said *they* couldn't do so, they were sure. Do you know Mr. Treadgold, Captain Mildmay?"

"No," he answered, "I have not that pleasure."

"Oh! but he's such a dear, darling man!" she exclaimed; "you really must send for him next time you are ill. Now, promise me you will, Captain Mildmay. You know nobody ever refuses me any thing."

"More's the pity!" murmured the old lady; and Arthur said—

"Really, Miss Bateman, I should be very sorry to be the first man so unfortunate as to be obliged to refuse you; but I hope it will be a long time before I want a medical man, and then perhaps I shall not be in London; so you see I should be afraid to make a promise I might be unable to keep."

"Perhaps, Miss Bateman," suggested Emma, "Captain Mildmay is fearful Mr. Treadgold would have to lecture him for his want of fortitude, and prefers a doctor who confines his conversation to the physical state of his patient."

"I detest fashionable doctors," observed Henry; "I was once beguiled into sending for one when I was ill at Bath, and, instead of telling me what was the matter with me, and what I ought to do to get well again, he treated me as a doating mamma would a spoilt child, saying in a languishing tone—'Well, well—we'll see what can be done. We

must try to keep this cough a little in abeyance, and all these little irritating symptoms ;' and he began to tell me various anecdotes about the Bath people, asking me if I had heard the report of this engagement or of that conjugal breach, and whether I had been present at Lady Jardine's magnificent entertainment the night before. Two or three visits sickened me of the fashionable gentleman, especially as I got no better ; so I came home, sent for our village apothecary, and was well in a week."

"La! how funny!" said Miss Bateman.

"Those men make it pay well, though, I am told," remarked Mr. Willis, a middle-aged bachelor, who had been talking to Emily ; "but the observation is as true as it is hackneyed, that men and women are more accessible to folly than to reason."

"Ah! Mr. Willis, that is just like one of your severe speeches," said Mrs. Fitzmaurice ; "though I am glad, this time, that you have not confined your satire to the ladies."

"Politeness sometimes stands in the way of truth, madam," he answered ; "perhaps I may have good reason for not rating the fair sex so highly as some others do ; but I have known a few men, besides women innumerable, who have been humbugged prodigiously by these scamps of doctors."

"What does *humbug* mean, Mr. Willis?" asked Miss Bateman, in all simplicity.

"It means a great deal—almost every thing we meet with in this world," replied Mr. Willis with a sardonic grin ; "indeed, most human beings are chiefly made up of it."

"Ah! well, I dare say," she returned ; "but I'm sure it's a very ugly word, and I don't think it's much used in fashionable circles."

"Probably not," said he ; "they would not care to be always betraying their own secret."

"Do you consider, then, Mr. Willis," asked Arthur laughing, "that the art of humbug is to be found only in what Miss Bateman calls fashionable circles?"

"I have really never sought or had the honour of being admitted to them ; but as I have met with little else than humbug all my life, that fact may be my answer to your question."

"Tell me," said Emma, "in whom and in what classes you have principally found it?"

"Ask me, rather, where I have not found it," he replied ; "ask me whether I have found gold scattered in my path, or the fabled treasures of Aladdin's lamp, and I should be more likely to answer Yes, than if you asked me whether I have found unsullied truth and sincerity in a fellow creature."

"But still," persisted Emma, "as I cannot yet bring myself to take your sweeping view of the falseness of mankind, I wish you would give me a few hints, to set me on my guard against those in whom I am most likely to meet with the largest quantity of 'humbug.' Forgive me," she added, glancing at Miss Bateman.

"You will meet with it," he replied, "in full vigour in two opposite classes of the modern professors of religion ; among those who fast, and bow, and daily make long prayers, and say, 'Stand back, I am holier than thou ;' and among those who virtually tell the sinner, both by precept and example, that real repentance and amendment of life are alike unrequired by God, so long as he retains a barren belief in the Atonement, or, rather, in his own election as a chosen vessel. When you see the poor and low-born bow down to the wealthy and the noble, be sure humbug is at work there ; when you hear of disinterested affection, of a girl pretending to love a poor and to despise a rich suitor," here he almost ground his teeth—"then, Miss Mordaunt, you will have seen the consummation of all falsehood and treachery, the most perfect specimen of humbug, in my opinion, which the world has to present."

"And you yourself, Mr. Willis," said Emma ; "are you then totally exempt from this all-prevailing vice ?"

"Far from it," he replied ; "had I been so by nature, could I touch pitch, and not be defiled ? But the truth is, I have lived a secluded life, and have had fewer ends to answer by cultivating the art than most other men."

Here he quitted the subject, and resumed his conversation with Emily.

"The world is indeed hollow and heartless," sighed Mrs. Fitzmaurice, not addressing any one in particular, and apparently uttering unconsciously her own reflections : "who would put their trust in its friendship ?"

"I am convinced Mrs. Fitzmaurice has never been led into such an error," observed Arthur.

"Alas ! for me," she replied ; " I have confided too fondly in others, only to be betrayed or forsaken, or to find myself an object of utter indifference to those whom I had cherished as my bosom friends."

"Perhaps," suggested Emma, "you had too many, and they became jealous of each other."

"I know not ; my capacity of loving is indeed unbounded, and my disappointment proportionably severe. You would scarcely believe, Miss Mordaunt, how often, in the course of a not very long life, my heart has been torn and lacerated by the discovery, that those I cherished were not what I fondly believed them to be. But I fear I shall never learn wisdom ; I fear I shall never grow suspicious ; it is not in my silly nature."

"Do not wish it," whispered Captain Spencer ; "be ever as you are, artless, confiding ; and let the reproach rest on the head of those who could wrong such a being."

"Spencer," said Arthur, "you positively shall not monopolize Mrs. Fitzmaurice in this way ; it is not fair to any of us. If I"—

Here he was interrupted by Miss Bateman, who, again, tired of hearing any one or any thing but herself made the subject of conversation, cried out—

"Captain Mildmay ! you must come and see the little summer-house I am building in my garden. It is being built entirely from my own fancy ; and, do you know, every one that has seen it says it will be a model of taste. You can bring Miss Vernon with you."

My father, who rarely spoke much in general society, and whose observations to-day had been reserved for Mrs. Mordaunt, caught this last sentence, and said—

"Where is it you are going, Caroline ?"

"Miss Bateman has been so obliging as to invite me to her summer-house, papa."

"Oh, yes ! and you come too, Sir Henry ; and all you ladies and gentlemen here ; and we will all drink tea on the lawn ; it will be such fun—won't it, mamma ?"

"My sweetest child," answered Mrs. Bateman, "would it not be best to take refreshment indoors ? Consider that September is coming in, and the evenings will be shortening and getting chilly."

"Nonsense, mamma ! I will have the tea on the lawn ; the evening will be just as warm as it is now, I have no doubt."

"In that case you must excuse me," said Emma, "and my sister too, I fancy; for we are both too subject to sore throats to encounter a sitting-down party in the open air on a September evening, in the flimsy attire one is supposed to wear on such occasions."

"And me," added Mrs. Fitzmaurice; "my chest, dearest Miss Bateman" (she thoroughly disliked this girl, while others only ridiculed her)—"my chest enforces on me a prudence which I find but too irksome."

"Oh! but you must all come," continued Miss Bateman; "I will have no 'No's!' Mamma, we will say next Thursday."

"Dear child! there's no refusing her any thing," murmured Mrs. Bateman.

"Fine times—fine times!" from Miss Norris.

"I daresay, ma'am," said Miss Bateman, pertly, "you would think yourself too old to come, would you not?"

"Yes, certainly, my dear; I have long been too old for the ways of most young people in these days."

The old lady's stiff starched cap, and old-fashioned black silk dress, assorted well with the formal rigidity of her manner; but she was rather a favourite with me, who prided myself on being different from other girls, and I said—

"I perfectly agree with you, Miss Norris; the last century would have suited my tastes and inclinations much better than the present does."

"Would it, Caroline?" asked Arthur with a smile; "would you have liked never to sit down in your parents' presence until you were told to do so, and to be allowed no will or choice of your own on any one occasion?"

These last words were slightly emphasized, and I answered quickly—

"The whole tone and spirit of the age is what I alluded to; those youthful restrictions you speak of were probably unfelt when the custom was universal."

"In every thing," said Mr. Willis, whose attention had been caught by my answer to Miss Norris; "in every thing, the eighteenth century and the commencement of the nineteenth far excel the present time—in talent, in learning, in statesmanship, in arms,* in the beauty of its women, in its

* Written before the war with Russia.

seclusion from the contaminating influence of foreign nations, and in having possessed some remains of good, staunch, old English principles, which we vainly look for now."

"And how did 'humbug' flourish then, Mr. Willis?" asked Emma, archly; "was any lady ever sincere in the last century?"

"Yes," he replied; "I believe there were a few real patriots, who had their country's honour and interest at heart, as well as their own aggrandizement, and who remembered that the two could never really be divided. I believe also that my mother loved my father better than any rich man she had ever met with."

We could scarcely forbear smiling at his warmth, and at the way in which this man, who had never been known to confide to a single human being the history of the disappointment which had embittered his life, and soured his disposition, was yet constantly betraying his feelings.

"Did I hear you running down foreign nations, Mr. Willis?" said the widow; "then I am sure you have never been to Paris."

"No, madam," he replied with great warmth; "I hope I never may set my foot in that modern Babylon. I look upon it as a sink of corruption; its men debased, its women degraded; and any English man or woman who remains there for a month, is likely to be made a hundredfold worse, bad as we have all become now. But, thank God! infidelity is not yet the religion of our aristocracy, nor superstition that of our peasantry."

"A visit to Paris would soon convert you from these heretical opinions, Mr. Willis; the lightness of the air, the gaiety of the people, and the novelty around you, would raise your spirits, and exhilarate you in spite of yourself. And I am sure," she added, playfully, you would not debar your fair countrywomen from the delights of Parisian shops, and the charms of French bonnets and gloves."

Mr. Willis was about to express himself somewhat forcibly on the subject of buying foreign goods, and leaving our own shopkeepers to starve; but Arthur, seeing his rising indignation, and good-naturedly wishing to avert a storm, made some remark upon the beauty of the churches and public buildings in the French capital; and, before he had done speaking, Mrs. Mordaunt gave the signal for the ladies to retire.

CHAPTER VIII.

It will probably be inferred from the account I have given of Mrs. Fitzmaurice's conversation and manners, that she was a very pretty woman ; as, without the aid of personal attractions, such folly and affectation would not be likely to be well received, or to produce the desired affect. Mrs. Fitzmaurice was not yet thirty ; her eyes were dark and bright, her nose just *un petit peu retroussé*, her mouth small, with very white teeth, and her raven hair bung in glossy ringlets. Her complexion, though not fair, was extremely clear ; and, where the natural roses had begun to fade a little, their place was skilfully supplied by a small quantity of rouge. She was short, with just enough of plumpness to be becoming ; and her whole style was *mignonne*. The deceased captain was a good-natured easy Irishman ; doating on his wife, and blind to all her faults ; allowing her to have her own way in every thing, and to be just as silly and coquettish as she pleased. To do her justice, she had fully appreciated these desirable qualities, and had been quite as much attached to him as it was in her nature to be ; but her feelings had never been very troublesome to her either by their strength or depth. It was her intention to form a second alliance, so soon as a decent term of widowhood should have expired, and she could meet with an eligible partner. She was very vain ; and when she and Miss Bateman were in company together, they generally clashed, from their conflicting claims upon the public attention.

As she left the dining-room, Mrs. Fitzmaurice threw her arm with a playful grace round Miss Bateman's waist, and, kissing her shoulder, said—

“ You darling thing ! How could you be so imprudent as to propose a party on the lawn on a cold September evening ?

after your being so ill, too, in London, and Mr. Treadgold telling you that you must positively take more care of your health? But you never do think of yourself."

"So every one tells me," answered the young lady; "and perhaps, after all, I might take cold, you know. But next summer every thing will be finished, and then I shall have a party."

A few minutes after, I heard Mrs. Fitzmaurice say to Emma—

"What a silly, tiresome little thing that Miss Bateman is; so disgustingly selfish, always talking and thinking of herself! She actually has the assurance to set up for a beauty, too; but her sickening vanity wouldn't be endured, if it were not for her thousand a-year that is to be."

I did not hear Emma's reply; but Mr. Willis recurred to my mind, and some similar scenes I had witnessed in town; and I wondered how the same person could wear two such opposite faces, according as one or the other might best suit their purpose. Had I looked home, I might have seen that though I was not, perhaps, systematically deceiving, I was not wholly exempt from the charge. For was I not one person to Agnes and another to Arthur? To her was I not proud, indifferent, and careless of her feelings and wishes? To him was I not loving, kind, and so anxious to stand high in his opinion, that my manner in his presence lost much of its haughtiness and unmindfulness of those around me?

I sat, however, near an open window, undisturbed by self-reproach, and reflecting on the faults and weaknesses of my fellow-creatures. There was no one in the room, excepting Emma, whose conversation could have afforded me the slightest pleasure; and, as she was good-naturedly occupied in listening to the unceasing flow of Miss Bateman's wearying, and to me insufferable, nonsense, I preferred remaining where I was, with the company of my own thoughts.

I was undisturbed till the entrance of the gentlemen. Captain Spencer immediately resumed his flirtation with Mrs. Fitzmaurice; and throughout the evening he carefully avoided paying me any attention beyond that which was due to a common acquaintance. I was rather surprised at this, remembering the vehemence of his words and manner after my rejection of him, and his ignorance, as I supposed, of my engagement to Arthur; but I was too happy to feel at all

mortified by his sudden relinquishment of any attempt to win my affection ; and indeed, as I attributed his coldness towards me to his own wounded vanity, I did not believe it to be genuine.

Music was now proposed ; Mrs. Fitzmaurice sang " Kathleen Mavourneen " in an affected style, and in a voice which did not display much musical power or skill. I was asked to take my seat at the piano, and I sang, first alone, and then with Arthur. Captain Spencer, who had remained in close attendance upon the little widow, turning over the leaves, and uttering complimentary remarks between the stanzas, left the instrument when I went to it, and, walking to a side-table, occupied himself with a book of prints. While Miss Bateman was murdering an air of Bellini's with variations, to which her powers were quite inadequate, Captain Spencer approached Arthur, who was standing at a short distance from me ; and, after saying a few words on indifferent subjects, he added, jokingly—

" Well, Arthur, I suppose you don't find much difficulty in getting rid of your time at Vernon Hall. You have been very hard-hearted towards that beautiful creature, Augusta Sutherland, who loves you still to distraction ; so beware lest you should meet with retribution in another quarter, more dangerous, I fancy, to your peace of mind."

For a moment Captain Spencer turned his eye upon me, and that look spoke little of indifference. He had evidently intended me to overhear what he had been saying, and he could not resist giving one glance to observe the effect of his words. Arthur only laughed, and said he would try to take care of himself, and not to inflict more suffering than he could avoid upon the susceptible hearts of his female acquaintances. After tea, Captain Spencer asked Mrs. Fitzmaurice if she would like a stroll in the garden. The extreme loveliness of the evening was a temptation to us all, and the Misses Mordaunt went in search of shawls to protect from the night air those who had not brought any wraps with them. The elder ones preferred remaining within doors ; Miss Norris had taken her departure immediately after dinner, greatly to the delight of Miss Bateman, who had observed on her leaving the room, " What a horrid, cross old quiz she was !"

Arthur of course gave me his arm ; and, without even looking to see in what order the others might be disposing of

themselves, we sauntered quietly down a solitary path. The harvest moon shone in full radiance, rendering the smallest objects as visible as in the sunshine,

“But mellow’d to that tender light,
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies;”

the soft descending dew was grateful after the parching heat of the preceding hours; and every thing around us was bathed in that chastened lustre, which rarely fails to kindle a sensation of admiration, even in the most insensible hearts. The scene accorded well with our feelings, which were those of surpassing happiness; for a time our hearts were too full for utterance, and we were silent as the silvery moon above us, or the flowers that grew at our feet. At length I made some trivial observation on a bat which crossed our path, and, for an instant, disturbed by the flapping of its wings the stillness that had reigned around. The spell was broken, and we spoke, and conversed (if such language may be termed *conversation*) as lovers are wont to do. We spoke of our mutual love, of its undying nature; of the bliss it would be to be united, and thenceforth to be one; joined in body and soul, to part no more till death should sever us. We spoke of sharing each other’s joys and lightening each other’s sorrows; of having but one heart and one mind; the same feelings, the same wishes, should animate us both, and each would live but for the other.

Bright dreams are these, golden visions, never to be fully realized on earth, lest we should learn to cling too fondly to this perishable world, to worship the creature rather than the Creator, and to lose sight of our eternal inheritance. But no saddening thought of impending care or gloom swept its heavy shadow over us on that bright evening—we revelled in the full enjoyment of that bliss which knows no equal in the delights of earth, those fleeting hours of which the poet has sung—

“Oh Love! young Love! bound in thy rosy chain,
Let sage or cynic prattle as he will,
These, and but these, redeem life’s years of ill.”

In the distance we saw Captain Spencer and his “new flame,” as I termed her, and I could not forbear asking—

“Is it true, Arthur, that Augusta Sutherland loves *you*, and is going to marry Lord Tintern?”

"Oh! you overheard Spencer's nonsense," said Arthur, smiling. "To tell you the honest truth, I believe, if I had tried, that I should not have found it so very difficult to win the young lady's heart; but Augusta is perfectly aware that she could never be any thing more to me than an old friend, and, as the wife of Lord Tintern, I hope she will discard some faults which she can well spare, and become as good and true as she is lovely and captivating."

"Do you like Captain Spencer?" I asked abruptly.

"Like him!" repeated Arthur in a tone of surprise; "why, my dear Caroline, I thought you had always heard me speak of him as one of my most intimate friends. When Spencer thinks it worth while to be agreeable, I do not know who could help liking him."

"He is very handsome," I answered; "and his knowledge of the world makes him an amusing companion."

"Your praise of him is rather negative," said Arthur; "but, when you know him better, I am convinced you will not speak of him so coolly."

"Nay, Arthur," I rejoined with a smile; "I saw a good deal of him in town this spring. What should you say"—here I looked up into his face—"if I told you that I might at this moment have been the Honourable Mrs. Spencer had it suited my views and inclinations to accept the gentleman?"

Arthur was evidently startled; and I thought an uneasy expression lurked in his eye, as he said quickly—

"Is it really so, Caroline? Well, I am surprised, and I need not add how thankful"—and he pressed my hand as he spoke—"that you refused him. Few young ladies, I fancy, would have rejected an offer from Spencer, for he has played the very devil among women's hearts; but, Caroline, I should never have suspected from his manner this evening, that he was a disappointed lover of yours."

"Perhaps," I answered, "he is already convinced of his folly in having made the offer at all; or, perhaps, he suspects the real state of the case between you and me."

"It may be so," said Arthur, and changed the conversation.

We now thought of returning to the house, as the sweet chime of the church clock announced the hour to be half-past ten; we went back by a different path, and found our heedlessness of the flight of time had made us the last of the

stragglers ; for the whole party was assembled in the drawing-room, and all were preparing to depart, except my father, who was waiting for us, and two or three who were to sleep at the rectory. I observed a smile on the countenances of most as we entered from the lawn through the window ; and Emma observed archly, that she hoped we had fully enjoyed our long moonlight ramble. My father's was a smile of evident pleasure as we approached him ; and, asking if we were ready to go, he rang the bell, and ordered the carriage. In half an hour more we were at home.

CHAPTER IX.

MY mother and Agnes had both retired to rest when we reached the Hall ; and, as I was not in the habit of visiting my cousin's room, I did not see her till breakfast-time the next morning. She came down looking more like a ghost than a human being, and her heavy eyelids and drooping look plainly betokened a sleepless night. As I shook hands with her, and observed her altered appearance, I thought of what her feelings must have been the evening before, when I was exulting in my newly-acquired happiness. The change effected in her by the last four-and-twenty hours was indeed fearful to behold ; it seemed as though she had borne up to the last, and then the struggle had been too great for her. Arthur saw it, too ; and I am sure that Emma Mordaunt's words recurred to him, for he sat down dispirited and silent. Even Lady Vernon was struck by Agnes's paleness, and exclaimed—

"My dear child, what is the matter with you ? You look as if you had not been in bed for the last three weeks."

"Agnes has kept too much at home, lately," said my father kindly ; "she must go more out into the air. She shall have a drive this morning with me."

"Indeed, I am quite well, dear uncle," replied Agnes, earnestly ; "I did not sleep much last night, which makes me look pale to-day. Had you a pleasant party, Caroline ?"

"Yes, very, dear Agnes," was my answer ; "and I wish you could have enjoyed it with us."

"Thank you, Caroline," she said. "I have always found the rectory pleasant, and all there most friendly and kind."

"Emma asked much after you," I continued ; "and she and Emily want to see you, to talk over many village matters."

"I will go and call on them," said Agnes, "the first possible opportunity."

"Why should you not go to-day?" asked Arthur. "Sir Henry, I know, was intending to drive Lady Vernon to Hartley Grange, and I could escort you two young ladies to the rectory, and pay my own respects there. Have you any objection, Caroline?"

"Not the least," I replied; "on the contrary, I should like it very much; and, as Agnes looks scarcely equal to walking to-day, she could ride my pony, and we could go on foot."

Arthur looked pleased at my proposal, and Agnes thanked me most sincerely.

After breakfast, Arthur sought an interview with my father, whose consent to our union was most joyfully given, and with the assurance that it had for months been the first wish of his heart.

Arthur thanked him cordially, and expressed his regret at the limited amount of his own fortune; but Sir Henry bade him not to consider that for one instant in the light of an obstacle to his marrying me, as he should prefer the son of his old friend as a husband for his daughter, to the wealthiest millionaire in England. I was now sent for; and, when I entered the room, I saw my father was deeply agitated by emotion of a pleasurable kind. He kissed me fondly; and, blessing us both, he prayed that God might grant us a long life of love and happiness, and told me that in this, as in all other events of my life, I had acted exactly in accordance with his wishes. I embraced him, as in tears I said, that not even with Arthur could I have been truly happy without his full consent and approbation.

I then went to my mother, whom I found in her boudoir reading a novel. She looked rather surprised to see that it was her daughter, and not her niece, who appeared before her, as I was little accustomed to seek a *tête-à-tête* with her.

"Come in, dear Caroline," she said, looking quite pleased. "I am so glad you are coming to sit with me a little, for Agnes was not well enough to read to me all the morning, so she is gone to lie down in her room. I was getting quite tired of being alone, and it's very kind of you to come and see me."

My poor mother! how had I neglected her for years, and how willing she was to hail the slightest symptom of atten-

tion on my part, and at once to forget and forgive all my negligence.

"Dear mamma," I began, sitting down on a low chair beside her sofa; "I have a piece of news to tell, which I hope will not be disagreeable to you."

"What is it?" asked my mother; "has Lord Hartley sent the Blenheim puppy he promised me? or has your papa made up his mind to drive me there this afternoon? Down, pussy—down!" she added in a languid tone, as a beautiful Persian cat jumped into her lap, and entangled her feet in her mistress's knitting, thereby giving poor Agnes the prospect of an hour or two's work to set all to rights again. "Is not she a love, Caroline?"

All my irritable, impatient feelings were fast returning, and I replied somewhat hastily—

"Really, mamma, I am the worst possible judge of such matters. Indeed, I am afraid the communication I have to make will interest you far less than if I had brought you the announcement of the arrival of your new spaniel."

"Then the darling creature has not come?" observed my mother, in rather a disappointed tone; "but I am sorry, dear, if I have said any thing to vex you. Oh dear! oh dear! my knitting; I shall never get it straight again without Agnes. Be so kind as to tell her, when you see her, Caroline, that she must step to my room for one minute before she goes out with you, or I shall not be able to do another stitch the whole afternoon."

Considering that the diminutive piece of work had been in hand daily for the last two months, and that Agnes had done the greater part of what had been accomplished, it did not seem as though one afternoon's cessation from labour could have been of any great moment. I refrained, however, from expressing this undutiful sentiment, and resumed—

"Well, but, mamma, I fear you do not care to hear what I have to tell."

"Indeed, I do, dear, very much; but you say Lord Hartley has not sent the dog. Had you any thing else to tell me?"

I bit my lips, but I thought of Arthur, and of the affectionate, dutiful way in which he always spoke of his mother; and again I repressed the rising taunt.

"Mamma, what should you say if I were to tell you that I am engaged to Arthur Mildmay!"

Lady Vernon looked at me for a minute in silence: the tears came into her eyes, and all a mother's fondness rose up in her heart, as she threw her arms round my neck, murmuring—

"My dear, dear child! God bless you both; and I am sure he *has* blest you in giving you such a husband; one who will always love you, and trust in you, and"—

Here my mother was overpowered by her emotion, and sobs impeded her utterance. I saw what was passing in her mind—I saw that her thoughts had flown back to that time when she too had loved, and had looked forward to a life brightened by mutual affection and confidence, before her spirit had been crushed by coldness and indifference, and at length driven to take refuge in apathy and frivolity. I was surprised and touched, for I had not believed her capable of feeling so strongly.

"Dear mamma," I said, returning her embrace, "I am so glad you are pleased at my engagement. But I was sure you liked Arthur."

"Indeed I do," she replied; "he is always so kind and thoughtful of me, and of dear Agnes too"—here I winced slightly. "He never forgets either of us; and he is so cheerful and pleasant, it makes one feel almost merry to see him and hear him talk."

A knock was heard at the door, and on my saying "Come in," appeared the stately figure of Mrs. Mivart. She was evidently astonished to see her mistress in tears; and, attributing them to some difference between us, she said—

"I will come again, Miss Caroline, when you have settled what you want with your mamma. I only wished to speak to her ladyship about re-dying the library curtains, which must be done if they are to be done at all, for they are more white than red already."

"Oh, yes! by all means, Mrs. Mivart, if your master can spare them," returned my mother; "but don't go away without hearing the news. Your young lady is going to marry Captain Mildmay."

The old woman did her best to appear as though she were neither astonished nor affected; but it would not do,

and she came up to me, and, seizing my extended hand, she pressed it to her lips, saying—

“The Lord preserve you and Captain Mildmay, Miss Vernon, and make you happy both here and hereafter!” and she abruptly quitted the room. The fact was, the somewhat opinionated old housekeeper, having once determined in her own mind that Captain Mildmay was attached to Miss Bray, chose to be blind to all the numerous signs he had since displayed of his devotion to me; so that, although she was far from having abandoned the hope of our “coming together” at last, she was quite unprepared for Lady Vernon’s announcement.

She had but just crossed the passage, and got out of sight, when my father came in; and, approaching his wife, he kissed her forehead, and said they must congratulate each other on their daughter’s good fortune. He added, that he was resolved to make the ensuing month of September one of gaiety and rejoicing at the Hall, and proposed driving my mother that afternoon to the Grange, and securing the party there. He asked me to make a list of the guests whom we would endeavour to assemble around us, that we might lose no time in writing to those we could not see. We were obliged to include several whose company was not likely to afford any of us much gratification, because we knew that, from their near neighbourhood, they had a claim on our hospitality. It was settled that the Mordaunts should be asked to afford night accommodation to a few, should more room be required; they themselves, of course, joining each day’s festivities at the Hall.

I went to inform, first Arthur, and then Mrs. Mivart, of our plans. The former was engaged in writing to Miss Sutherland, to acknowledge the ring and the note accompanying it. A slight thrill of—I know not what—it certainly did not amount to jealousy—passed through me when I found him thus occupied; and my dream of Augusta, transformed into a glittering snake, involuntarily recurred to me.

“I suppose, Arthur,” I said, in what I intended for an indifferent tone; “I suppose the style of your correspondence with your beautiful friend is too tender to be allowed to meet my eye.”

He looked up with more of wonder than displeasure;

and, quietly finishing his note, he put it into my hands, and began another. It was as follows:—

“VERNON HALL, August 27, 18—.

“MY DEAR AUGUSTA,—The little packet with which you intrusted Miss Vernon had altogether escaped her memory, until she received your letter yesterday morning. This will account for my apparent rudeness in having left your kind note and pretty gift so long unacknowledged. Let me now offer my best thanks for both, and my sincere assurances of the pleasure it will ever afford me to possess so elegant a token of the regard of so old a friend. As to the slight service I was so fortunate as to be able to render you, I can only trust that you will not call forth my blushes by alluding to it again, as it was one which no man similarly placed could have done otherwise than joyfully render to a fellow-creature.

“Most warmly, my dear Augusta, do I congratulate you on your engagement to Lord Tintern. An acquaintance—I may almost now term it a friendship—of several years’ standing with him, has long convinced me that the woman he should select for his wife would be one of the happiest in England—unless, indeed (as you and I can hardly imagine), he should have made choice of one who would have proved herself indifferent to his merits. I shall write to him myself, to present my own congratulations on his having captivated my fair friend, when so many others have sighed in vain. For yourself, I feel I may—with more security than one can always feel on such occasions—offer you my very sincere wishes for your happiness; for your choice has ensured it to you, as far as it is in any woman’s power to do so.

“With Miss Vernon’s love to yourself, and my kind regards to all your party.

“Believe me, your faithful friend,

“ARTHUR G. MILDMAY.”

“Thank you, dear Arthur,” I said, as I laid down the note.

“May it go?” asked he, with a smile.

“Yes, of course,” I answered; “but, Arthur, I want you to listen to me for a few minutes.”

He put aside his pen while I told him of the festivities

we had been arranging; and I added that my father was writing to Mrs. Mildmay, to beg that she and her only remaining daughter would join us without loss of time. Arthur said the letter he was now engaged upon was to his mother, and he would urge her to comply with our wishes, and come to us at once.

I left him to seek Mrs. Mivart, whom I found down-stairs in her own little sitting-room. She was in an arm-chair, apparently absorbed in her own reflections; but she rose when I entered, and, with the respect which she conceived to be due to my exalted position, she signified that I was to possess myself of the luxurious seat she had just quitted. I soon made her acquainted with the family plans; and, at first, she was quite bewildered at the idea of receiving so much company; for little, indeed, had been seen at Vernon Hall during the reign of her present master.

"How *can* I ever be ready by the first of September?" was her first despairing exclamation; "but I will do my best for the honour of the old house. The curtains, too—not fit to be seen! and no time to get them dyed; I said, months ago, they ought to have been done."

"We must have new ones," was my reply, "and replace all other things that may be wanting. I know papa wishes to spare no expense on the present occasion, and he is going to send off a messenger to town this very day for all that may be required both in the furnishing and culinary departments."

"There's the true spirit of the Vernons in both of you!" murmured the old woman, admiringly; and with the utmost zest she immediately set about helping me to form my list of things to be brought from London. It was a tolerably long one when it was finished, and I took it to submit to my father, of whose approbation there was little doubt. Lady Vernon was on all occasions a mere cipher in the house, and I was in reality as completely the mistress of it, as if my father had been a widower.

At last I thought of Agnes; and, really ashamed of my selfish forgetfulness, I went to the door of her room, and knocked softly. On being admitted, I found she had risen from the bed on which a sudden faintness had compelled her to lie down, and was sitting by a little table, with her head resting on her hand. I took the other in mine, and said with real contrition—

"Dear Agnes, I have been very negligent in not coming to see you before, but papa has kept me so fully employed. Do you feel better now?"

"I am quite well again, thank you!" she replied. "Tell me at what hour you—you intend going to the Rectory, for I think I will keep quiet till then."

"Do," I said, "and I will send you up something to do you good. As to the hour, I am sure Arthur will wish to go whenever you feel most inclined."

Agnes shuddered slightly at the mention of his name by me; but only saying she could be ready at any time, and thanking me again for coming to her, she resumed her former listless attitude, and said no more. I was greatly shocked; but many considerations prevented me from giving utterance to my feelings, so, hastily kissing her, I left the room.

Arthur had finished his writing, and was awaiting my appearance at our *tête-a-tête* luncheon, for Sir Henry and Lady Vernon had already gone.

"How is Agnes?" were his first words. "I cannot endure to see her miserable, patient face, and reflect on my own villainy in having ruined her spirits and perhaps her health. She looked half-dead this morning."

"I have just been with her," I replied; "and she is better, but will not come down till we set off for the Rectory, so I am going to send her some refreshment. I am most sincerely sorry for her; but at the same time, my dear Arthur, I must say I think it is a little unjust, and cannot be very pleasing to me, to hear you term the bestowal of your love upon me an act of *villainy*."

"I was wrong, dearest Caroline; oh! forgive me. *You* best know my heart; but surely you cannot wonder at my remorse."

We talked on more cheering subjects, and at three o'clock we sallied forth; Agnes riding on my little Shetland, and Arthur and myself on foot. We all felt a sort of constraint and embarrassment, which was not surprising, considering our relative situations; and, until we emerged from the park gates into the lane beyond, we spoke but seldom, and then only to remark on the beauty of the day, or its sultriness. As we approached the village, Agnes observed on the rapid progress which had taken place during the last week in the erection of some new cottages, saying, she

thought one of them already showed signs of habitation. These tenements, about five in number, were being built at the expense of Mr. Mordaunt and my father; and they purposed letting them at a merely nominal rent to a few deserving old people, who, at present, were occupying some of the worst and most tumble-down hovels. They were designed with every attention to comfort and neatness, and not without some regard to good taste. Each had its little plot of ground for flowers and vegetables; the aspect was warm and sunny, and at the back protected by a rising hill from the north wind.

As we drew nearer, we saw that Agnes was right in her conjecture, and that the cottage nearest to the village was tenanted. Leaning over the garden gate was a woman, apparently about thirty, dressed in deep mourning. Her whole look and demeanour were superior to the class to which she seemed to belong; and the little boy, whose hand she held, was so striking that we involuntarily paused. He was a child of about five years old, and the term *beautiful* was certainly no exaggeration when applied to him. His face was fair, his eyes were large and of the deepest blue, and his soft chestnut hair waved in natural curls above his brow. But, besides the regularity and sweet expression of his features, there was something *distingué* about the boy, which spoke, even more plainly than the appearance of the woman, of a rank higher than that which circumstances seemed to have assigned to them.

I was the first to speak. "When did you come into this cottage?" I asked. "We were not aware that even one was yet occupied."

The woman raised her head; but in her dark, almost olive-coloured skin, and sad expression, no likeness could be traced to the bright boy who stood beside her, gazing at us with wonder and curiosity. She shook her head, to imply that she did not understand me.

"*Etes vous Française ?*" I asked.

"*Non, Mademoiselle, je suis Italienne,*" she replied with a tolerable accent.

She appeared so reluctant to be questioned, that I did not pursue the conversation much further; though her manner was more than civil, it was polite—and rather implied a sense of equality than of inferiority.

I could not resist asking her the age of her child, which I had rightly guessed at about five. He stood looking at us, and occasionally smiling ; but though his fair skin and light brown hair, scarcely admitted the idea of his being a native of the "sunny south," yet he evidently understood little of what we said to each other in English. Seeing our eyes directed towards him he laughed, and volunteered the information, with a strong foreign accent, that his name was Frank. He did not seem to be aware that he had any other name ; but was proceeding to say something more, when the woman put a stop to his conversational tendencies by desiring him in Italian to go into the house, and amuse himself there till it was cooler. Before the little fellow obeyed her, he removed his large flapping straw hat, and bowed gracefully to us. We wished our interesting, but unsociable, acquaintance good-bye, and went on our way.

We naturally conversed during the remainder of our walk upon the singular scene we had just witnessed, and the mystery which enveloped these new inhabitants of our village. Agnes suggested, that possibly the Mordaunts might be able to enlighten us, and we hoped that this might be the case, for our curiosity was really excited. But it was not doomed to be gratified. We found only the two young ladies at home ; and they told us that the cottage in question, which, as we had already observed, was wholly detached from the others, was not built either by Mr. Mordaunt or Sir Henry ; and they added that the purchaser of the plot of ground, and the inhabitants of the tenement, were alike unknown to them. Emma fully entered into our wish for information, and said she would do her best to obtain it. Emily observed that, if the poor woman had any good reason for desiring to remain *incognita*, we must be careful not to publish the matter should we succeed in unravelling it.

"Was she in widow's mourning?" asked Emma.

"No," I answered ; "but it was very deep."

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt now came in, and I informed them of the inroad we might perhaps have to make on their hospitality. With their usual kindness, they said they only hoped we should consider the Rectory as our own, and make any use of it that might be most convenient for us. They did not inquire into the reason of these sudden festivities ; but I think they were not without some suspicion of the

truth. While Arthur and I were talking to Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt, the girls had drawn Agnes a little aside, and were affectionately inquiring after her health, and grieving over her altered looks. She answered them with great composure, and said she expected each day to feel stronger and better. She did not attempt to give any reason for her indisposition, and they were too well-bred and too kind-hearted to ask any questions. I asked for Henry, and was told he had gone to spend the day at Hartley Grange. We now took our leave, and at the door we encountered Mr. Willis, who had slept at the Rectory the preceding night, and did not intend to return home till the following day. I told him a note from my father was on its way to his house, begging him for once to break through his rule, and join the circle about to be assembled at the hall. To my surprise, instead of giving a decided refusal, he said he was very much obliged to Sir Henry, and, with his leave, would take time to consider of it.

"What *can* have come to Mr. Willis?" I exclaimed, as soon as we had parted from him; "dining and sleeping two nights at the Rectory, and actually hesitating about accepting an invitation to stay in the house with a large party!"

"Has he always been so entire a recluse?" asked Arthur; "or is it a whim of late years?"

"Indeed," I answered, "little is known in these parts of his early life, which was chiefly spent in or near London; but it is believed that he was very gay, and got through at least half of his property. About seven years ago, when he was little more than thirty, he took possession of that pretty cottage on the road between Leyton and Marden, and there he has remained ever since; nor do I think that he has been known to sleep a night away from home till the last, when he consented to remain at the Mordaunts. When he first came to live here, I remember it was rumoured that he had formerly borne a different name, and had recently changed it for that of Willis, in consequence of an inheritance of about a thousand a-year, left to him under this condition. It was supposed that this did not comprise the whole of his income, though he had but one maid-servant, and a man to look after his horse and garden, he shut up all except two rooms for himself, and two garrets for his servants, and refused to see a human being. His charities have been unbounded. Many

of the surrounding gentlemen called upon him, but all were denied admittance; and exactly three days after each of these gentlemen had paid him their visit, his card was left at their doors. He was a regular attendant at Leyton church; and, after five years of entire solitude, he at last agreed to see Mr. Mordaunt. Since then, he has relaxed so far as to act as a magistrate, and occasionally to admit a visiter at his own cottage, and even to call in return; but ladies have always inspired him with the greatest abhorrence, and if, on any one of these occasions, a daughter of the family has chanced to enter the room, he has been observed to shudder, and to make some excuse for going away directly. His extraordinary conduct is imagined to have been caused by some disappointment in love, and I think not unjustly, after the hints he dropped last night."

"I think so, too," replied Arthur; "but I fancy I see a reason for this alteration in his behaviour—don't you, Caroline?"

"No, I do not; what is it?"

I was not very quicksighted in these matters unless my feelings were personally interested in the case; and then, as the reader may have already observed, I was given to surmise a good deal beyond the truth.

"I believe I can guess your meaning, Captain Mildmay," said Agnes; "for I was at the Rectory one morning when Mr. Willis was there."

"Were you?" asked Arthur, abstractedly, and at that moment their eyes met. It was but for a moment, however; for Agnes quickly turned her's away, and Arthur fixed his upon the ground. But I had seen it, and said, angrily—

"It is *thus* that Agnes reads what is passing in your mind, I suppose, Arthur! Really it is quite embarrassing to play third on these occasions, and, at this distance from London, the proprieties of etiquette scarcely require the sacrifice. Another day I will be careful not to inflict my presence upon you."

At this cruel taunt, Agnes covered her face with her hand, and almost shrieked the words—

"Oh, Caroline, Caroline! spare me! I have not deserved this!"

The colour rose in Arthur's cheek, and overspread his forehead, as he said in a firm and commanding tone—

"Caroline, if you have the slightest particle of affection for me, be silent! I entreat—nay, more—I desire it!"

I *was* silent, not only because there was something in his voice and manner which I *dared* not disobey, but because I was nearly choked by mingled feelings of shame and anger.

We had now reached the cottage with the unknown tenant; and, as we passed its gate, every blind was down, and not the smallest sight or sound was there to tell of any living thing. Arthur turned to Agnes, and, pointedly addressing her, he made the above remark, adding, that the woman had doubtless kept the child indoors until we should have repassed her gate, and left the coast clear. Agnes made no reply, and we went on in perfect silence till we reached home. The first object that met my eyes was Captain Spencer's card on the hall table, and that of "Mr. Norman Bankes, —— Regiment," lying by it. Seizing with pretended eagerness on the former, I exclaimed—

"How vexed I am to have missed Captain Spencer; are not you, Arthur? Richard (to a servant), how long is it since Captain Spencer and Mr. Bankes called?"

"Not five minutes, miss," said he; "if you had come by the lower path you must have met them."

"How provoking!" I continued; "we might have secured him, and now, perhaps, he will have some other engagement."

Arthur returned no answer; he saw through my intention of annoying him, and was far too much hurt at this and my previous conduct to take any notice of what I said. Agnes had disappeared, and we stood alone in the little room appropriated to hats, sticks, and garden bonnets. My pride would support me no longer; and, as Arthur turned away to look out at the window, I said passionately:—

"Arthur, I will not thus be trifled with! Yesterday you were pouring forth the most ardent protestations of eternal love and unceasing care for my happiness; and now you are spurning both, and trampling down my pride into the very dust beneath your feet!"

"But where is the call for pride, Caroline?" asked Arthur gently, but gravely, as he turned towards me. "What has any one done to draw forth all this violence from you?"

More in sorrow than in anger he spoke; but my feelings

were exactly the reverse, as I burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"Arthur, Arthur!" I said, "you are cruel indeed! Upbraid me, revile me, if you will; but do not treat me with this scornful coldness. I cannot—cannot bear it."

A moment more, and I was locked in Arthur's embrace, and he was imploring my forgiveness. Our engagement was yet of too recent standing for a scene of strife and anger to be of any duration; and in my folly and blindness I believed that it would ever be thus—that I should never lose the power of vanquishing him in any struggle, let me be right or wrong, that might arise between us.

Still, as I went to my room, these lines came to my mind; though little did I imagine that they could ever be really applicable to myself and Arthur:—

"Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love!
Hearts that the world in vain had tried,
And sorrow but more closely tied;
That stood the storm when waves were rough,
Yet in a sunny hour fall off,
Like ships that have gone down at sea,
When Heaven was all tranquillity!
A something light as air—a look—
A word unkind, or wrongly taken,
Oh! lovè, that tempests never shook,
- A breath, a touch like this hath shaken.
And ruder words will soon rush in
To spread the breach that words begin;
And eyes forget the gentle ray
They wore in courtship's smiling day;
And voices lose the tone that shed
A tenderness round all they said;
Till fast declining, one by one,
The sweetnesss of love are gone,
And hearts so lately mingled, seem
Like broken clouds, or like the stream
That smiling left the mountain's brow,
As though its waters ne'er could sever,
Yet, ere it reach the plain below,
Breaks into floods that part for ever."

CHAPTER X.

THE few days that intervened between the scene I have just related and the arrival of our guests, passed rapidly away—at least to Arthur and myself. I had sent to town for a very handsome set of ornaments, which I intended for Agnes, and took them to her, saying, I thought she might like to wear them while we had company in the house. I had expected her to be overwhelmed with gratitude at the splendour of the gift; and was not a little astonished when, after looking at them, she said quietly, that she was extremely obliged to me, but they were far too handsome for her to wear, and she trusted I should not misunderstand her motive in declining them.

I endeavoured to combat her scruples, but in vain; and at length I desisted, rather angry at what I considered her thankless indifference. I forgot that only that very morning I had spoken to her in the most harsh and bitter manner, merely because she had expressed an opinion on some trivial subject in accordance with Arthur's, and in opposition to my own. I forgot that scarcely a day had passed, during the first year of her sojourn at Vernon Hall, without my saying something calculated either to wound her feelings, or to show my total disregard of them. True it was that Agnes had not resented my behaviour; but it is not in human nature to be indifferent to such conduct from those on whom we feel we have a claim for kindness and sympathy. Gifts, and even benefits, can never buy love; on the contrary, if accompanied by hard words and an uncomplimentary temper, they seem to put us under a painful sense of obligation, without the power of feeling the gratitude we would wish towards the conferrer. And so, again, we see how truly those can make themselves beloved who have no means of

giving us aught beyond kind looks and words, and the sympathy of an affectionate heart.

Had I considered all this, and considered, too, that I had not only robbed Agnes of her happiness, but that she was compelled daily, and almost hourly, to undergo the dreadful suffering of witnessing the man she loved devoted to another, I might have judged her differently, notwithstanding all my pride and hard-heartedness. Most girls, in Agnes's situation, have at least the solace of being separated from their faithless lover, but she had not this alleviation.

The griefs which come direct from the hand of God have a softening effect upon us, unless we are entirely steeled and hardened against every good impression; but it is a lofty nature, indeed, that can rise superior to the tyranny and cruelty of our own near friends or relations, and can come forth unscathed from so trying an ordeal, with a temper unsoured and unembittered, and a consciousness that the oppressed are, in truth, more to be envied than the oppressors. It has been well said—"Forgiveness belongs only to the injured; the injurers never forgive." I could never forgive Agnes, though she had never, by word or deed, offended me; she could forgive me, though my whole conduct towards her had been little else than a series of neglect, and, too often, of pointed unkindness. The misfortune is, that we see all these things so clearly in others, and are so blind to them in ourselves—wilfully blind, it may be, but this only deprives us of our last excuse.

Our preparations were all completed by the appointed morning; but the workmen had laboured day and night, for the time allowed them was but short for all they had had to do. When we walked through the rooms the evening before our guests were to assemble, I could not help sharing in Mrs. Mivart's feeling of pride and exultation, though I was more careful than she was to conceal it. The old place did look most noble; its new and handsome decorations were in keeping with the antiquity of the house, and nothing had been left undone that money and good taste combined could effect, to do honour to the betrothal of her who was to inherit the long-descended home of her ancestors. But the dearest reflection of all was, that I was enabled, by the circumstances of my birth and fortune, to bring so goodly a dower to the husband of my choice. When Arthur ex-

pressed his admiration of all around him, I whispered something of this in his ear, but I found I had better have left it unsaid. I had not intended to convey the slightest sense of obligation on his part, or of superiority on mine—only to make him feel that the happiness of being the heiress of such possessions was enhanced tenfold by the prospect of his sharing them with me; but I had not yet discovered that his inferiority of fortune was a very sore point with Arthur, and that the idea that least pleased him, in his union with me, was, that all his wealth and much of his consequence would be derived from his wife. He had of course consented to add the name of Vernon to that of Mildmay; but, as I afterwards found, even that had cost him a pang. He had told me, and so had my father, that his family had once been as rich as our own, though now so fallen from its high estate, but recently enough to rankle at times in the memory of its living representative.

But all melancholy thoughts seemed to have taken their flight next day, which realized Miss Bateman's prognostications of the continuance of fine weather. The party included those whom we had met at dinner at the rectory, besides several others. Lord and Lady Hartley had brought their second daughter, Laura, who, though not yet introduced into the world, was allowed to share in the gaieties on this occasion. Her sister was a constant invalid, and always remained at home. Miss Sutherland and Lord Tintern completed the party from Hartley Grange.

Mrs. Mildmay and her daughter Melocine were accompanied by the affianced husband of the latter, Major Douglas. My future mother and sister were most affectionate and cordial towards me, and their appearance and manner were such as to enhance my pleasure at the prospect of entering their family.

The day following the arrival of our guests, the younger members of our circle set off on a pic-nic excursion, to visit some ruins about eight miles distant. Some were in carriages, some on horseback, and the highest spirits seemed to pervade the whole party. Augusta Sutherland had all but insisted on sharing the carriage in which Arthur and I were going; and Lord Tintern, though evidently little pleased with the arrangement, had no power of opposing it with any effect, as the wilful young lady had said nothing of her in-

tention till the vehicles were at the door, when she had coolly requested her *fiancé* to hand her into the only vacant seat in our britzka, the third being occupied by Melocine Mildmay, and Major Douglas and another gentleman were on the box. I could see that Lord Tintern attempted a gentle remonstrance, but Augusta silenced him by saying in her softest tones—

"Indeed, dear Edward, I *must* be with dear Caroline and Melocine to-day ; consider how long it is since we have met, and, besides, I am sure Laura would rather you should ride by her side, and look after her skittish little pony."

A great deal was required to make Lord Tintern angry—a very little to make him sad ; and it was with an expression of real pain on his countenance that he turned away, only saying—"You know, dearest, that in such things I always wish you to please yourself."

Such things! then Lord Tintern had already discovered that his divine Augusta was not the embodiment of entire perfection which he had fondly imagined her ! He had learnt that all her wishes were not so thoroughly unselfish and unworldly as he had once believed them to be.

As we drove off, Arthur said—

"Really, Augusta, this is scarcely making a generous use of your power. Were I in Tintern's place, I should not very readily forgive your desertion. But *I* have no business to say a word," he added, "since your cruelty to him has given us the pleasure of your company."

"Oh !" replied Augusta in a careless tone, and laughing slightly, "Lord Tintern is never *really* angry ; indeed," she added, curling her lip a little, "I don't know what he would gain by being so ; besides I shall make him the '*amende honorable*' when we get to — Castle, and I dare say he will prize my society all the more from having been deprived of it for a few hours. He is very much in love—is not he, Melocine ?"

"Yes, I should say so, but surely you must be the best judge of that, Augusta," answered Miss Mildmay.

"I don't know," said Augusta, pensively ; "when we are ourselves so fondly attached to an object, our wishes are too prone to become our opinions, and—and—but it won't do," she cried, suddenly bursting out laughing ; "I am in too high spirits to moralize or sentimentalize to-day ; and, in-

deed, I do not think my present companions are any more disposed for it than I am."

Lord Tintern and his sister now cantered past the carriage ; and Augusta, her face radiant with smiles, nodded gaily to them, waving her handkerchief to Lord Tintern to show him that the lace was torn, and pretending to assume a doleful expression. But Lord Tintern would not smile.

"Poor Edward!" observed Augusta, leaning gracefully back ; "I am afraid he is really quite taking my capriciousness to heart."

"And you know that you would be extremely hurt and mortified if he did not," said Arthur.

Augusta gave him a glance, of which I could not understand the import, but resumed in her former careless tone—

"Arthur, I am labouring hard to convince Lord Tintern that I am not, and cannot be made, a perfect being ; and surely never was man so difficult to disenchant. He expects me to be an angel, and that, verily, not with a man's usual selfish egotistical idea, that *his* wife *must* be an angel, but because his standard of women is so high, that he imagines them as free from faults and follies as from crimes and sins. *You*, my dear Caroline, have no such Utopian notions to contend with, I trust ; nor *you*, Melocine," looking up at the sober, and not very youthful, figure of Miss Mildmay's admirer.

Arthur said something about its being very shameful of her to quarrel with Lord Tintern for believing that her inward graces were not inferior to her external charms ; and this compliment seemed to give Augusta great pleasure. But I was beginning to be rather annoyed at Arthur's habit of making pretty speeches to Miss Sutherland ; and perhaps my countenance exhibited some sign of this feeling, for Augusta, though she had scarcely appeared to cast her eyes on me, immediately changed the conversation, and asked Melocine whether she did not admire the forest scenery through which we were driving. "But to you, who have been so much in Italy, all our scenery must be tame."

"I must own," answered Melocine, "that the bold and grand style is more to my taste ; but still I can admire an English landscape, though I have been so long abroad."

Miss Sutherland soon got tired of talking about the charms of nature, and began to ask Melocine several questions about the society of different continental cities. At the next pause

she observed, that she had not yet had a single minute alone with me, and that many minutes would not suffice for all she had to say, and she looked expressively from me to Arthur.

"Who is that young lady?" asked she, as we passed Agnes in a little low pony chair driven by Emma Mordaunt. "I did not observe her yesterday evening."

"She was not down-stairs," I answered; "she is my cousin, Miss Bray."

"Indeed!" rejoined Augusta, in that peculiar tone she occasionally assumed; "there is not the *least* resemblance—is there, Arthur?"

He made no reply, and was apparently absorbed in his own reflections.

"I don't think I ever heard you mention this cousin, Caroline; has she been staying long at the Hall?"

"She has lived with us since the death of her mother, about a year and a half ago."

"How kind of Sir Henry, and of you, too!" remarked Miss Sutherland. "How dearly she must love you."

I winced a little; but Augusta's curiosity was excited, and for once got the better of her rule of selecting only pleasing subjects of conversation.

"She looks very pale and melancholy," continued she. "Arthur, you are quick-sighted for a man; if it is not betraying confidence, do tell me what has given that expression of profound sadness to so young a face?"

"Miss Bray has known much trouble and sorrow in the course of a short life," answered Arthur; "and, though she has strength and character to bear with fortitude, she has a heart to feel and suffer, even in silence."

"What a comfort for her," pursued Augusta, "to have such a home, and the society of such a cousin!"

This was followed by a general silence, which was at length broken by Melocine; and she and Augusta conversed together during the remainder of the drive.

When we reached the castle, we found that only the equestrians, and the carriage driven by Captain Spencer, had outstripped us in speed. Lord Tintern had dismounted, and stood in silence, awaiting our arrival. We all alighted, and took our seats upon some of the fallen stones till the rest of the party should join us. At this instant, a man, with a cloak wrapped round him as carefully as though it

had been the depth of winter, instead of a bright warm September day, appeared from beneath an archway, but paused suddenly on observing that his path must lead him close to where our group had established themselves. His hesitation, however, was but momentary; and, pulling his hat down over his eyes, till it nearly concealed the upper part of his face, he came on with a rapid step. Mrs. Fitzmaurice was one of the ladies who had the honour of being driven by Captain Spencer, and she had already become so deeply engrossed in conversation with his young friend, Mr. Norman Bankes, that she had not observed the stranger, and was first made aware of his presence by his entangling one foot in her light and floating dress as he brushed hastily past her. She instantly uttered a loud shriek, after the most approved fashion of second-rate coquettes, and seemed so near fainting that Mr. Bankes thought himself obliged to support her. The gentleman (for such he undoubtedly was, in spite of the slovenliness of his attire) turned round; and, having succeeded in releasing himself, he made a low bow, which he evidently intended to take the place of a humble apology, for he did not say a single word. I had a passing glimpse of his countenance, and there was—I know not what—about his bearing and in his manner, when he bowed to Mrs. Fitzmaurice, that recalled to my mind a dim, hazy remembrance of some one I had seen, when or where I could not tell, perhaps only in a dream.

He was hastening onwards, when in the narrow pathway he encountered Mr. Willis, Henry and Emily Mordaunt, and Miss Bateman. Their steps had been unheard on the grass-grown track, and the stranger instinctively drew aside to allow the ladies to pass him. His eye wandered listlessly over the faces of the new-comers, when suddenly he started, staggered back a pace or too, and gave vent to a sound, amounting almost to a stifled groan of agony or rage, it would have been difficult to decide which. His cheek, naturally dark and colourless, became deadly pale, and his frame quivered with ill-suppressed emotion. It was but an instant, however—

“But in that instant o’er his soul
Winters of memory seem’d to roll,
And gather in that drop of time
A life of pain, an age of crime!”

It was but an instant, and he had recovered his composure, and walked rapidly through the gateway leading into the road we had just quitted. Arthur, Augusta, and Henry Mordaunt were the only members of our party, besides myself, who had observed any thing strange or unusual in the appearance and demeanour of this man; Emily was lost in a reverie; Mrs. Fitzmaurice, Miss Bateman, and Mr. Bankes, were too much occupied with themselves or with each other; Lord Tintern and Mr. Willis were in a state of abstraction; and Captain Spencer, Major Douglas, and Melocine, had strolled away to a little distance.

"Which of you four could it possibly have been," I exclaimed, "that excited him in that extraordinary manner?"

"Mr. Willis, I think," said Augusta, smiling.

"Or Miss Bateman," suggested Henry.

"La! Mr. Mordaunt, how can you say so? Do you really suppose he was so struck with admiration?"

"How else are we to account for his conduct?" asked Henry, looking round with a wondering expression.

"Thank you, Mr. Bankes, I'm better now," in a faint voice from the widow: "I am very weak and silly; but ever since poor dear Captain Fitzmaurice's death my nerves have been so easily shaken."

"Ah!" returned her new admirer, "the nerves are a very puzzling subject—a very puzzling subject indeed, and I have often thought of devoting some time to the study of them; how the mind acts upon the body, and the body upon the mind; how strangely the two are interwoven in our mortal nature—it would be an endless theme to explore fully, and many things I have to engross my time and attention; but now, Mrs. Fitzmaurice, after you have given me an additional interest in the subject,"—here a glance, meant to be tender, from a pair of very unsentimental dingy grey eyes.

"Ah, yes!" sighed the lady, who had understood almost as little as Miss Bateman of Mr. Bankes's remarks, and that a compliment was intended at the end of the sentence Bankes had not done. Turning to Mr. Willis,

"Perhaps such subjects may be too strong for your mind to grapple with, sir; but I am sure you are full of the greatest attractions, and I am sure you have a story to relate related by Sir
exercised so strong

course, to that unhappy gentleman in 'Demonology and Witchcraft,' who night and day beheld a skeleton before his eyes pursuing him every where, and haunting him to the hour of his death. Yet his understanding convinced him of the unreality of the apparition, even while it preyed upon his spirits and hastened his end. But that's the anomaly that exists."

"Ah, Bankes! have you reached that sentence? Then, ladies and gentlemen, you may know that his oration has come to a conclusion," observed Captain Spencer, who now rejoined us.

From the specimen I have given of Mr. Bankes's conversation, it might be supposed that he was not altogether adapted to the taste of Mrs. Fitzmaurice; but she had ascertained that very morning that he was already the possessor of a good income, with the prospect of an increase at no very distant period. *He* was captivated by her good looks, her assumed admiration of his supposed talents, and perhaps a little, unconsciously, by the conviction that she would never prove a rival to him in intellectual powers and acquirements.

"Spencer," said Arthur to him, aside, "where did you pick up that eccentric youth? He is not much in your way, I should fancy."

"Not much," replied he, "in any sense of the expression, for I always manage to palm him off upon some one who is not up to him, as I am. But he is a good sort of fellow, and his father once saved mine from drowning, or something romantic of that sort, so we have him down at Belmont now and then. I don't know," he added sneeringly, "whether I can suffer him to perpetrate that folly," looking at Mrs. Fitzmaurice; "I have not quite made up my mind."

Arthur looked amused, and said he could not imagine what was detaining the rest of our companions on the road. Henry Mordaunt remarked that they were all keeping together when he had lost sight of them.

"If they are not here in a quarter of an hour's time," he said, "I shall get a nag at the inn, and go and look after them."

He seemed a little uneasy. Agnes was probably in his thoughts even more than his sister Emma.

"Are you any thing of a connoisseur in architecture, sir?"

asked Mr. Bankes, again addressing Mr. Willis, of whose intellect he had evidently conceived rather a high opinion.

"I have studied the subject a little," answered Mr. Willis, who happened to know a great deal about it.

"And so have I," rejoined Mr. Bankes, "and I was wishing for your opinion, Mr. Willis, as to what particular age that archway belongs. Though it looks so ancient, I believe from—from many little signs with which you and I are conversant, that it is not of earlier date than the time of Henry the Eighth."

Mr. Willis only replied by opening the guide-book, which distinctly asserted that this archway and other parts of the building had been erected in the reign of Edward the Third.

"Believe me, Mr. Willis," returned Mr. Bankes, "these guide-books are not to be trusted in the least—a mere catch-penny, my dear sir—take my word for it. Why, only the other day, I was escorting a party of ladies over some ruins in Lancashire, and I called their attention to a richly-carved doorway, which both our guide and his book declared to have been placed there in the age of Edward the Sixth. 'Quite impossible, my dear Miss Richards!' I said to the young lady with whom I was walking; 'believe me, that doorway was a design of no later a century than the thirteenth. It belongs to that era of architecture!' And so it proved on consulting some of the archives of the castle. And my belief, sir, is, that that archway never cast its shadow upon that sloping bank, till Henry the Eighth sat upon the throne of his ancestors."

Mr. Willis allowed him to go on, and then, taking a little note-book from his pocket, he showed him, by indisputable evidence from a contemporary author, that the archway in question had been erected in the early years of the reign of the third Edward.

Mr. Bankes consoled himself by murmuring something about "the anomaly," &c.; and Mrs. Fitzmaurice consoled him by observing—

"Mr. Bankes can afford to be mistaken for once."

During all this time Lord Tintern and Augusta had not interchanged a single word, and the young lady was growing a little uneasy at his protracted silence. She bit her lip, and frowned; but, when next he came in sight, she called him by his name. He immediately approached her,

and they walked away together. Apparently she had not miscalculated the extent of her power, for five minutes had not elapsed before they rejoined us, Augusta laughing merrily, probably at her own success in having so quickly banished all trace of moodiness or sadness from her lover's brow. She could not forbear a triumphant glance at Arthur and myself; but I thought how little temptation I was ever likely to experience in wishing to separate from Arthur, and seek the company of others; and he smiled a significant smile, which meant to say, the game might be played once too often. Be that as it might, all was peace and enjoyment amongst us; and now we saw our loitering companions, with Henry Mordaunt, successively taking the turn which brought them to our sight. Our first inquiry was, what had kept them so long on the road; and we were informed that one of the pony-chaises had been upset, but no damage had occurred beyond a trifling accident to the wheel, which had, however, obliged them to wait while the mischief was being repaired. Our next question was, whether they had seen the mysterious stranger, but all replied in the negative. Henry said, that while the horse was being saddled for him, he had asked the landlord of the little inn whether a gentleman, slight and rather tall, and wearing a cloak, had visited his house that day?

"Yes," answered the landlord; "the gentleman I am sure is the same you mean. He came here about ten o'clock this morning, alone and on foot, and was very anxious to know how many cottages there were in the village, and the names of all the people living in them. Being but a new-comer myself, I could not tell him as much as I should have wished; for you know, sir, one always seems to want to do all one can to serve a poor helpless foreigner, and such he certainly was by his talk; but I promised him, if he came again in a few days, I would try in the mean time to get at the names of the village folk. He said, he was very much obliged to me, and would certainly be here on Friday; he had a pint of sherry and some sandwiches, and went to take a turn among the ruins, and since that I have seen no more of him; but my wife tells me she saw him run by like a madman about an hour and a half ago. That's all I know about him, sir."

"How very amusing!" observed Miss Bateman. "Well!

he was an elegant-looking man, and I should quite like to know him. His figure reminded me a little of Lord Lowndes's, only he was not quite so manly. Have you ever met Lord Lowndes, Miss Sutherland?"

"Yes—frequently!" replied Augusta, who had in fact refused him twice; the young lord's entire want of fortune more than counterbalancing the fascination of his father's earldom. However, Miss Sutherland, being now in her highest spirits, was inclined to humour Miss Bateman by teasing her a little about him.

"He was a great admirer of your's, I think! and one of those to whom you were so cruel in town this spring? Ah! Miss Bateman, if we could see him at this instant, surely his face would not be wearing the bright and joyous smile playing on that of his fair enslaver; perhaps he is now willing away his lonely hours in sad and bitter thoughts."

"That is highly probable," remarked Captain Spencer; "for the last I heard of him was, that he had sought a temporary refuge from his creditors in some poking country town in Germany, his father having at last declared himself both unwilling and unable to pay his debts any more."

Miss Bateman, who had not overheard this speech, made answer to Augusta, by exclaiming affectedly—

"La! Miss Sutherland, how can you talk so? I really don't know which way to look, with every one's eyes upon me! Indeed, I wish you wouldn't! You know I could not help his liking me so much, could I?"

"Don't draw her out any more, dear Augusta," whispered Lady Laura; "you see every one is making such fun of her."

Augusta smiled, and repressed a frown at the youthful Laura's interference; but she seemed resolved to "do the amiable" thoroughly to Lord Tintern during the remainder of the day; so she drew the fair young girl's arm within her own, saying audibly—"Dear Laura! you are very right, as you always are;" and the future sisters led the way to the ruins, which we began to think it was time to explore.

Mr. Bankes now again became eloquent, and entered into an elaborate exposition of the style of architecture; the especial purpose for which every little door, gate, window, or loophole, had been designed; the beauty of some parts, and the defects of others. He occasionally appealed to Mr. Willis, and once or twice to Arthur; but the former did not

think it worth while to contradict him any more, and Arthur professed entire ignorance on the subject.

"But your's is, at all events, not the ignorance that refuses or scorns to be enlightened," said Mr. Bankes, with the most condescending politeness. "You might hardly credit it," turning to Mr. Willis; "but, my dear sir, I assure you, it is not to be told what a man of sense and education has to encounter when he enters the army. Of course, here and there I meet with a bright exception; but, oh! if you could see the blank vacant stare with which any remark I may chance to make on a rational subject is received at the mess-table! And really, sir, when perhaps I have been devoting my whole morning to study and reflection on some work of nature or of art, it is very hard to have to adapt my conversation to their tastes and capacities. Ballet-dancers and actresses, betting, steeple-chases, and fighting-dogs—pah! sometimes I give it up in despair, and remain pretty nearly silent all dinner-time."

"It's a service of glory and danger," said Mrs. Fitzmaurice, "and as such I am convinced Mr. Bankes values the profession as it deserves."

"I do, Mrs. Fitzmaurice," he answered; "and I wish some of the young puppies in it would regard it in the just light in which you view it."

Presently Arthur and I detached ourselves a little from our companions, and, standing upon a gentle eminence, we overlooked a ruined wall, with the remains of the ancient moat far beneath us; while, beyond it, the river, from which it had been supplied, pursued its winding course through the beautiful landscape, rich in "hill and vale, and wood and water," with the ridge of hazy cliffs in the distant horizon. The only sounds that reached our ears were the sweet murmurs of the little cascade, or the gentle lowing of the flocks and herds grazing on the plain, and borne upwards by the soft autumnal breeze; and most perfectly they harmonized with this enchanting scene.

As we thus stood and gazed, we thought (as who could help thinking?) on the unchanging nature even of God's perishable works, as compared with the most lasting stronghold ever erected by man. Behind us was a picturesque mass of ruins, every year sinking deeper and deeper into decay; before us was the lovely prospect I have but very faintly

described, shining in all its beauty and freshness, as it had shone in the eyes of those who looked upon it from this very spot long centuries ago. The old castle was rich in legend and tradition ; and this led us to picture to ourselves the days when a goodly train of lordly warriors and high-bred dames might have been seen issuing forth from the gateway beneath us, reining in their fresh and spirited palfreys, each fair damsel gazing hopefully on the favourite falcon perched on her wrist, which promised her the sport she loved so well. Thence, too, had ridden forth the lord of this noble pile, arrayed for battle against those who opposed his royal master's authority, and attended by his numerous retinue of vassals and retainers, perhaps numerous enough not to have disgraced the train of a prince of the blood.

And within those walls, we thought, had occurred scenes of romance, deeper and wilder than those which glimmered upon us through the dim light of tradition, or have existed only in the imagination of the poet or the novelist. There, perchance, woman had loved on against hope, and even unto death, like the ill-fated heroine of Kenilworth ; or her deep love had turned to a still deeper revenge, and the gleaming dagger, or the poisoned chalice, had attested that such things have been in actual reality no less than in fabled story ; and borne witness to the mournful truth, that the most awful of human passions, when uncontrolled, may transform those created in God's image into the likeness of fiends.

There, too, had men sat, and indulged their dreams of ambition, their thirst for glory, or their still stronger thirst for gain. And those damp, dark, subterranean dungeons, of which the traces were still visible ; oh ! what tales could not their walls unfold of captives immured for life within their sepulchral precincts—the living, as it were, consigned to the abodes of the dead ! Some, fresh from the torture, with bleeding bodies and mutilated limbs, with no prospect to cheer them save that of a speedy death. And others, perhaps less happy, with strong health and bounding youth, enabling them to live on from year to year, in defiance of the dark atmosphere around them, and the scanty pittance allowed them ; their thoughts dwelling on the bright morning of their existence, when in a far distant land they had rejoiced in a happy home and loving friends, whom they might behold no more.

And, then, as we turned our eyes again upon the glorious beauty of the scene before us, speaking in its eloquent silence of nought but love and joy and peace, we could not but be forcibly reminded that His ways are not as our ways, neither are our thoughts His thoughts.

We had been stationary for several minutes ; our hearts were too full for utterance, and we felt that words were powerless to express the depth and intensity of our happiness in loving each other, and gazing together on such sights as these. We now turned to rejoin our friends, who, we imagined, must all be wishing to repair to the inn—all, at least, who were not too much in love to remember that there were such things as eating and drinking necessary to the comfort and enjoyment of mortals.

Our group was soon re-united ; and, after partaking of such fare as the inn supplied, plain, but excellent of its sort, we returned home, very well pleased with our excursion.

Days glided on in a round of such amusements as a country house affords in the month of September ; the gentlemen not failing to make havoc amongst the partridges and other game, which were strictly preserved by my father. But, amidst all this festivity and rejoicing, my heart was ill at ease. I saw that not a day passed without the occurrence of some trifle, which reminded Arthur of his desertion of Agnes, and added a pang to her sorrows, and to his feelings of self-reproach. But, worse than this in my eyes, not a day passed that did not give some fresh proof, however slight, of Augusta's love for Arthur. True, she was guarded and cautious in my presence ; far more so than with Lord Tintern, in whose open honourable mind no suspicion dwelt, and who at that time would as readily have disputed the evidence of his own senses as the strength and reality of Augusta's affection for him. But, with all her worldliness and insincerity, on this one subject her feelings were too powerful to admit of her restraining them entirely, even before me ; and, moreover, she knew not to what an extent my suspicions had been awakened. Captain Spencer saw it all ; and, occasionally, I had to bear the keen searching glance of his cold, hard eye, when any little circumstance occurred to corroborate his former assertion to me.

There was another who saw it, too, but with very different emotions ; not with triumph or exultation, but with deep

and bitter sorrow. This was the young Lady Laura Tintern, who, though but just seventeen, combined with the winning freshness of youth a power of judgment and penetration belonging to more advanced years. She was not actually pretty; and yet, if any one had made this remark, you would have been inclined to contradict them, for she possessed every outward charm and grace, except the measured beauty of feature. She had expression, style—nay, more, she was graceful and elegant in the extreme, and carried off the palm of admiration from many a girl with whom her face would not really have borne a strict comparison. Her disposition was a most loveable one, and she had too much sense and spirit to suffer amiability to degenerate into mawkishness. She was becoming daily more and more attached to Agnes, with whom her acquaintance, however, was comparatively recent. Upon me she looked as an old friend, and towards her my manner was usually affectionate, for I was very fond of her.

One morning I discovered her seated alone in my mother's room, which had just been vacated by her and Agnes, with the intention of taking an airing during a fine interval in a showery day. I had a book in my hand, and Laura was so absorbed in her's that my entrance was unobserved by her, and she started when I laid my hand on her shoulder, and asked what was interesting her so deeply.

"I am reading 'Woodstock' for the first time," she replied; "what a beautiful story it is, Caroline! and I have to thank it for diverting my thoughts this morning from a very melancholy channel."

"Melancholy! dear Laura?" said I, stooping down and kissing her fair forehead; "that must be a little fancy, I think. Your joyous face could never wear a mournful expression, I am quite sure; for, within and without, all things combine to make you happy."

"Do they?" asked she quickly, and brushing away the fast falling tears, which the ideas suggested by my last speech had called forth. "Ah! Caroline, you think, and so I believe do all others who give themselves the trouble to think about me, that, because I am naturally merry and light-hearted, I can have no cause for sorrow, and no heart for feeling it; but this is not true, indeed. Oh! Caroline," she continued, with increasing earnestness, "why are there not more

women in the world like Alice Lee, whose mind was as lovely as her face? How can people be for ever saying one thing and meaning another?"

"I know not, my dear Laura," I answered, laughing; "but I believe your first season's experience will teach you that the Alice Lee in real life is the exception, not the rule."

"But that is no consolation to me," observed Laura, sadly.

"But do you stand in need of especial consolation just now? You must forgive me, dear child, if I smile to see how, in the absence of all real occasion for grief, you have taken it into your wise little head to puzzle one out for yourself, and have fixed upon the old cry against the hollowness and heartlessness of women! Why, Laura, I have not vexed you?" I continued, as I saw her face overspread with a bright flush, and she bent again over her book, as though giving it her utmost attention.

She was only silent for a moment, however; then, springing up, and casting down the volume, to my astonishment she threw her arms around my neck, and, burying her face on my shoulder, she sobbed aloud. I endeavoured to soothe her to the best of my ability, and at length she became calmer, and sitting down on a low stool at my feet, with my hand still clasped in hers, she said—

"Caroline, I know not if I am right in speaking to any one of that which is weighing so heavily on my mind; but I want advice—I want to be told by some one wiser than myself how I ought to act. I am so afraid of distressing papa and mamma; and, besides, I think they would either conclude I had made a silly mistake, or else would not keep my secret. Then there are Eraily and Emma Mordaunt, whom I love dearly; but—but—no matter why I would rather speak to you than to them. Caroline, if I have discovered for myself that which another person did not intend me to know, and yet am under no promise of secrecy, am I bound to preserve an inviolable silence, however disastrous may be the consequences of my doing so?"

A light now flashed across my mind, rendered quick-sighted by my own suspicions; and I answered, without hesitation—

"My dear Laura, indeed your secret is no secret to me. You are grieved because you cannot help seeing that.

Augusta Sutherland does not love your brother as he believes, or as she professes."

Laura was startled by my words, and said—

"How could you have guessed that, Caroline? I fancied it was only my own affection for Edward that made me so clear-sighted. I shut my eyes to it as long as I could, but I cannot now. Oh! if he ever finds it out, it will break his heart, he loves her so intensely; his whole soul seems wrapped up in her. And yet, Caroline, would it not be better for him to know it before than after marriage? What is to become of him through all the long dreary years of wedded life, knowing that his wife has deceived him, that she has never really cared for him, and that he can have no sort of confidence in her?" She paused, overcome by sorrow; but soon she added—

"Perhaps you may think my grief extravagant, Caroline, for you have never had a brother, and can scarcely tell what a sister's affection is. He is my only brother, and I have been to him almost as an only sister, owing to poor Elizabeth's sad state; and, oh! such a brother as he has always been to me—so unselfish, so considerate of my wishes—ever ready to make excuses for me when I was a troublesome child, and threatened with punishment for my wildness; and, with all his own quietness, never being annoyed by my mirth. And now to think of the life he is doomed to lead, unless his eyes can be opened in time; and even then, what would his sufferings be! I believe the discovery, whenever he makes it, will almost kill him. And Augusta is so kind, so good-natured in many ways, and has been so affectionate to me! I can hardly bear to speak against her. It is so strange to me how she can help loving my brother; and stranger still, that she can be to him such an accomplished hypocrite! Do you know, Caroline," said Laura, looking up into my face for a moment, "though the idea is so preposterously absurd, and his devotion to you makes it quite impossible, but at times it has appeared to me as if she had a fancy for Captain Mildmay? But I have grown so suspicious in this little time, that I have taken it into my head that this is only a blind—another piece of acting on her part."

"It is to be hoped so, certainly, for her own sake," I answered, with assumed indifference. "But, Laura, what do you propose doing?"

"That is what I cannot tell," she said. "So long as I had only my own fears to go upon I was resolved to be silent, however dreadful might be the consequences; but this morning, a Lady Tracy, a correspondent of Augusta's, who I can only suppose has taken offence at something without Augusta's knowledge, sent me *this*."

She took from her pocket an envelope containing two notes; the enclosure, she said, she would not show me, but she had opened it first herself, and the lines on which her eye had rested, had proved, in Augusta's own handwriting, the truth of what Laura had dreaded. She had folded up the note again without reading further, and felt as though she had acted dishonourably in being surprised even into reading what she had; "but," she added, "I have no scruples about Lady Tracy, so, pray take her letter, and tell me what you think of it. I have often heard Augusta speak of her as one of her truest friends, and one to whom she could confide every thought and feeling."

I took the paper from Laura's hands, and read:—

"— TERRACE, BRIGHTON, *September 15, 18—*.

"**MADAM**—As Lord Tintern's sister, I venture to hope that the enclosed note will prove a sufficient excuse, even to a perfect stranger, for addressing you. It will be needless for me to trouble you with the reasons which, in addition to my unwillingness to suffer such duplicity to remain unmasked, have induced me to act as I am now doing; suffice it to say, that matters have come to my knowledge within the last few days, entirely justifying me in my own eyes, and, I may add, in those of any impartial person acquainted with the circumstances.—I remain, Madam, your obedient servant,

"HENRIETTA TRACY."

I made no immediate remark on perusing the note, reflecting on the strangeness of this occurrence, and wondering whether Augusta's confidential letter to her dear and trustworthy friend (for to her I supposed it to be addressed) contained any allusion to the real object of her attachment. But I felt that Laura had acted rightly in not reading it, and I said so, expressing my astonishment at Lady Tracy's betrayal of Augusta.

"That part of the affair surprises me least," answered Laura; "for the friendship of such persons can never be grounded in truth and sincerity, when those qualities are foreign to their natures, and so the slightest desire of revenge would be acted upon immediately. Had I opened Lady Tracy's note first, I should at once have returned the enclosure unopened, and declined any knowledge acquired by such means; but now I cannot say that its contents are altogether unknown to me. If I show it to Augusta, I shall of course make her an enemy for life, perhaps without the power of preventing her marriage with Edward; yet I do not feel as if I had any right to show it him, nor yet any right by my silence to be a consenting party to the foul deception practised upon him. So good, so true, so generous!" she continued, rising from her seat, and pacing the room, and stamping her little foot in indignation at the idea of her brother's wrongs.

She did not ask again for advice, for which I was thankful, as I knew that her own conscience was likely to prove a surer guide than any opinion I could give. She soon resumed her seat, saying—

"Thank you, dear Caroline, for your kind sympathy. I am sure you have felt for my distress and anxiety. But I am very angry with myself for allowing my wishes so to blind my sense of right and wrong, that I did not at once see the only course I *could* pursue was to go to Augusta, tell her every thing, even my regret at having inadvertently read part of her note to another person, and entreat her to persevere no longer in this wicked path of deception, which can only bring misery on her and Edward. Not that I am so vain or so silly as to suppose that she will listen to me; but it is my duty to warn her, and I must do it."

She spoke firmly; and, pressing my hand, she left the room in search of Miss Sutherland. On her way she met Captain Spencer, who asked where I was to be found, and, receiving the desired information, he came to the open door, and asked me if I would not join him and my friends in a little stroll before the next shower. I assented mechanically, for my head was full of what I had just heard; and, only waiting to put on my bonnet and shawl, I went with him into the garden. He led me past several of our party, who were sunning themselves on the broad gravel

walks ; and at a sharp turn in the shrubbery we saw Arthur and Augusta, arm in arm, walking slowly along, at a short distance before us. I did not utter a word, and I believe my countenance did not betray me even to the keen eye of Captain Spencer, who, however, required no such outward sign to convince him of what my feelings must be, when, as our quicker steps rapidly gained upon their's, we heard Miss Sutherland exclaim, passionately—"Arthur ! I have struggled long and desperately, but in vain, for my secret has now escaped me ; and, hate or despise me as you will, I love you with all my soul, and must till death !"

They had now reached the end of the walk, which not leading into any other, they were obliged to turn back ; and, before Arthur had had time to make any reply, they stood, directly facing us, at the distance of half a dozen paces. Our silence had prevented them from being aware of our approach upon the gravel path, rendered soft by the recent showers. Augusta's face was flushed, and the tears of wounded pride and affection were streaming down her cheeks. She started, Arthur bit his lip, but not one of us spoke ; till Captain Spencer, with his most sneering tone and smile, observed, how glad he was that he had been able to induce Miss Vernon to take a little air while the sun shone. As if by mutual consent we retraced our steps to the house, where Augusta at once took refuge in her own apartment, and I speedily followed her example.

CHAPTER XI.

WE met not again till the bell summoned us to dinner. Augusta refused admittance even to her "dear Laura;" and when Arthur sent a message by a servant, requesting to see me before he took his afternoon ride with Lord Tintern, I declined the interview, saying that I felt too tired and unwell to leave my room again before the evening. The truth was, I dared not, in my present state of angry excitement, trust myself alone with Arthur. At all events, I thought, I shall at least have my revenge; and in honour, in the commonest honesty, Arthur cannot allow his friend to be thus deceived; or, if he does, I will not! I will then at once proclaim to him Augusta's perfidy towards us both. And yet, selfishly speaking, was it to my interest that she should remain single? would she not thus have far greater opportunity for pursuing her views with respect to my husband, than if she were under the care and guardianship of her own? One thing was certain; if I were to be silent on the scene I had witnessed that morning, Laura *must* say enough to awaken her brother's suspicions, and render him watchful of the conduct of his wife. And Captain Spencer, too! every one seemed in league against me; for I could scarcely doubt his object in having asked me to walk out with him, and leading me to the very spot where he had probably observed Arthur and Augusta apart from the rest, and had anticipated something of a scene or a *denouement*.

As I thus sat and pondered, I thought myself very miserable; but how little did I then know of what misery really is! How have the events of later years taught me to look upon those days as days of bliss, clouded only by the qualifying draught ever mingled in earth's sweetest joy, and by my own jealous and haughty thoughts. I not

well assured of Arthur's love? had he not renounced another for my sake, and was he likely to change now? And if not, what mattered all the rest to me, so far as my personal happiness was concerned? But I writhed under the idea of Arthur's daring to conceal from me the knowledge of Miss Sutherland's attachment to himself; forgetting that, perhaps, till that morning he had had nothing to conceal, and that I had refused to see him since. And I ended my cogitations by weeping long and bitterly, till the first dinner-bell recalled me to myself, and I hastened to prepare for meeting the numerous circle assembled, rendered more numerous that day by some fresh arrivals, and some guests from the neighbourhood. But, struggle as I might to assume my wonted dignity, the traces of tears, of violent convulsive weeping, obstinately remained; and I had only the alternative of pretending to be ill, and thereby gratifying to the utmost the two I most desired to mortify, or of appearing with the signs of unmistakeable emotion on my countenance. The former was not to be thought of, so the latter must be endured. With all the haste I could make, I was last; and I entered the spacious drawing-rooms, brilliantly lighted up, and half full of company, while every eye was turned upon me, and some few were scrutinizing me with a more especial interest. I murmured an apology for being late, but was spared the exertion of saying more by the immediate announcement of dinner. Arthur advanced to give me his arm, which I took with what I considered a becoming degree of coldness; but his voice was kind and tender as he whispered in my ear, in our passage to the dining-room—

"How ill you are looking, Caroline! Why would you not see me to-day, dear, when I sent to beg that you would?"

"Your question can be answered quite as well by yourself as by me, I should think," was my ungracious reply.

We sat down to a rich banquet, at a well-filled table of immense length, groaning beneath the weight of the massive and handsome plate which covered it, and containing every dainty that could tempt the appetite of the most fastidious epicure. Nothing that wealth or luxury could supply was wanting there; but where was the heart for enjoying all this splendour? Did that pale man, with his sad and thoughtful brow, from which the bright expression, kindled by the first excited moments of delight at my engagement, had

already vanished—did he look as though the possession of all these things had had power to render his life happy, and free from care? Did that wan, inanimate being, who sat opposite to him at the upper end of the room, with her small delicate features, and air of feebleness, and weariness of the pomp and bustle around her—did she impress others with the idea that “her life was a day of unclouded delight,” as the mistress of all of which he was master? And for myself, the heiress of this mansion and its *appanages*—but enough of these reflections.

I must in my turn take a scrutinizing glance at those around me. Does Lord Tintern seem overwhelmed by the depth of his anguish? No! for there he sits, his quiet, grave face actually beaming with happiness as he listens to the beloved one at his side, and replies in a low, soft, earnest tone to her remarks. Then he knows nought of that which it so concerns his peace to know! Arthur! Arthur! are you, too, playing false? And she, the perfidious fair one, there she is, her smile if possible brighter than ever, her laugh more joyous; and not a sign of the morning’s deep emotion visible, save perhaps a very slight increase of colour in her cheek! *She* had evidently made no haste at her toilette, for she was beautifully dressed, and adorned with costly ornaments lavished on her by her affianced husband. She looked triumphantly lovely and bewitching; and as, at that moment, I saw the reflection in an opposite mirror of my own heavy and swollen eyelids, flushed cheeks, and sullen, dejected countenance, a sharp pang shot through my heart at the consciousness of how far she must surpass me in all impartial eyes, perchance even in those of Arthur himself.

And Captain Spencer was laughing and talking with Lady Laura, who must have assumed a mirth she did not really feel. I heard him say—

“Your brother is a fortunate man; is he not, Lady Laura?”

“Is he?” she answered, vacantly.

“Has he not won a piece of matchless beauty, whose heart is devoted to him, as she has proved by her indifference to all other admirers?”

Laura reddened slightly, as if she knew by his sneering, cynical tone that he was probing her; but she answered, coolly—

"Miss Sutherland is indeed, as you say, most lovely," and turned the conversation.

Arthur and I scarcely exchanged half-a-dozen words during the whole of dinner, so I had ample leisure for attending to my neighbours, after being once roused from my reverie. Captain Spencer's next attack was upon Augusta herself. Addressing her across the table, he said he thought he might congratulate her on being all the more blooming from her morning's stroll.

"You were with Miss Sutherland, I think, Tintern? oh no! I forgot, it was Mildmay. Mildmay, you had quite a long walk with Miss Sutherland, had you not?"

But Augusta saved him the trouble of replying.

"Yes, I had a most pleasant stroll with Captain Mildmay, and am quite relieved to find, Captain Spencer, that my roses have not become fiery red from the effects of the autumnal breeze. I did not tell you of my nice walk in the shrubbery with Captain Mildmay—did I, Edward?"

"No, you did not," he answered; "but I am very glad to hear you have been out."

"Where have you been to-day, Mr. Willis?" asked Mr. Banks.

"I walked into the village and back again."

"And Agnes and Emily and I went, too," said Emma Mordaunt; "and, Miss Vernon, Agnes showed us your dark-eyed acquaintance wandering in her garden, but we could not catch a glimpse of the beautiful little boy. I tried to excite Mr. Willis's curiosity, but in vain; though, after his declaring he did not feel any about the mysterious man at the ruins, I might have known it was a hopeless task."

"Really," said Mr. Willis, "I concluded he was some Polish adventurer, possibly pretending to be a count, and have never thought of him since, except when mentioned by you young ladies."

"He was evidently not so indifferent," rejoined Emma; "and, if I am not very much mistaken, that was not the first time you had seen him."

"It must have been in some public office in London, then," replied Mr. Willis.

"For shame, Mr. Willis!" interposed Mrs. Fitzmaurice; "the man was a gentleman, even supposing he were a brigand or a corsair, or had some delightful romantic pro-

fession of that sort in his own country. Did he not look a gentleman all over, Mr. Bankes?"

"I did not observe him with my usual accuracy, for my thoughts were engaged elsewhere" (with a glance at his neighbour;) "but, as far as my opinion is worth having under such disadvantageous circumstances, I should say he might fairly be reckoned one of the *gentle* class of the country to which he belongs. That country, I presume, is Italy, not Poland, begging pardon of Mr. Willis for differing from him."

"In my opinion," said Miss Bateman, "the man was neither a corsair nor a brigand, but a real Italian count in disguise."

Miss Bateman was especially spiteful against Mrs. Fitzmaurice just now, because the latter, on the whole, certainly engrossed more attention from the young gentlemen than she did, notwithstanding the ten or twelve years' difference in their ages; and, with all the short-sightedness belonging to a little mind and a contracted understanding, Miss Bateman took no trouble to conceal her mortification, and found consolation only in her own overweening vanity, which convinced her that the fault lay in the judgment of those "*beaux*" with whom she was just now doomed to associate. Mrs. Fitzmaurice, with a view of gratifying Mr. Bankes, hazarded a remark upon Carlyle's "Hero worship," saying she had read a most interesting review of it somewhere; and, while Mr. Bankes was endeavouring to assist her somewhat confused memory, Miss Bateman took occasion to observe, in rather a high-pitched tone of voice—

"La! I had no idea Mrs. Fitzmaurice was such a blue! For *my* part, I am quite of Lord Lowndes's opinion—I don't see what ladies have to do with such books, or with Latin and Greek, and such things. They were never taught at Madame Pignord's academy."

Miss Bateman was in the habit of calling every lady a blue who owned to having read any book but a novel or a poem, and now her silliness had a strong touch of acerbity in it; for, in addition to the injuries above mentioned, she was smarting under the galling one of being seated between two young ladies, and just opposite to her old enemy, Miss Norris, who inspired her with a degree of awe, notwithstanding her pretended contempt for the old lady.

"*Blues* and *beaux* are words come in since my day,"

said the latter, "and so are the things they mean, too, I fancy."

"Yes, madam," returned the young lady, "fashions are perpetually changing, and wise people, who have lived in good society, change with them."

Miss Norris replied only by a look of pity, and Miss Bateman laughed vacantly at her own wit, as no one else seemed disposed to do so. Besides, Miss Bateman rarely said any thing which she did not conclude with a laugh. Her mind resembled Nature's abhorrence, a perfect vacuum, but a vacuum into which there was little hope of instilling good matter. It is very wearing to those gifted with only an ordinary share of sense and understanding to live with such persons as Miss Bateman; who, combining silliness with stupidity, seem past all chance of improvement. Something of course may be done by early education, and by endeavouring to ensure that the few ideas the mind is capable of receiving shall be good and true ones; and poor Miss Bateman had not had this advantage, for her mother was scarcely less weak and ill-judging than herself. Surely, I thought, no man could ever venture to marry her, even with the inducement of her money. A passionate—a sulky temper may be overcome, or rooted out; an artificial character may be taught to value higher and better things; a plain face may be far more than counterbalanced by a lovely mind; but for deficiency there is no cure;—one mortal cannot impart to another that of which he possesses no foundation to go upon; and years bring only added folly to one incapable of profiting by any experience.

While I thus reflected, the conversation had turned upon the literature of the day—its novels, romances, and poems; its works of history and science. At first I was surprised when I heard Augusta declaiming eloquently on the evil tendency of some novels which had of late years issued from the press, saying she believed, from what others had told her, they were copies from the French school. I was surprised because, not many months before, I had known Augusta profess a great admiration for some of the very books she was now decrying, and declare herself particularly fond of French novels, laughing at what she termed "the pious scruples of some canting old people of the last century;" but *then* she had been among a set of her own, where she had no

motive for concealing her real feelings ; *now*, a glance at Lord Tintern's approving face gave me the clue to what at first seemed so inexplicable. For Augusta was not holding forth unsolicited, or in a bold unfeminine manner ; her opinion of some of these books had been asked by Captain Spencer, and she answered quietly and decidedly, and with every appearance of truth and sincerity. I could hardly resist the temptation of recalling to her recollection her former words on the selfsame subject ; but my pride, and my sense of the politeness due to a guest, came to my aid, and I refrained.

"Our sentiments, I rejoice to find, are in unison," said Lord Tintern ; "though I could not have doubted what your feeling would be, Augusta, as to such disgraceful publications. They work insidiously, by gradually undermining the taste for a higher order of writing, and by a show of virtuous and moral sophistry, by which, to young and weak minds, they hope to disguise the bad and wicked passions they are bent upon recommending and fostering."

"To young girls," remarked Augusta, "untaught in the world and its ways, and with all the natural susceptibility of their feelings unchecked, they must, I should think, be peculiarly dangerous. But the subject is not a pleasing one. Mr. Willis, have you seen the little church so beautifully restored of late at —, by Sir Reginald Murray ? Lord Tintern took Laura and myself there the other day, and we were both delighted—were we not, Laura ? I am sure you would think it worth going many miles to see."

Mr. Willis replied that he had not visited the church, but he contemplated doing so ; and Lord Tintern, who was rather an enthusiast in such matters, described it more fully and minutely to Mr. Willis than Miss Sutherland was capable of doing.

"Do you mean to take it as the model of your own ?" asked Mr. Willis.

"With a very few alterations, I think I cannot do better," answered Edward.

Mr. Bankes, however, though he had not seen the church in question, suggested several improvements upon it, without which, he said, he had rather see a village church remain in its old dilapidated state, which to the thoughtful mind was not devoid of its charm. It was such a church and church-

yard, he was convinced, that had inspired the poet with his immortal elegy, which, as he observed with a greater show of eloquence than of reason, would live on through ages and generations, when all modern improvements and decorations had long been mouldering in the dust.

"For my part," said Captain Spencer, "I am quite sick of these eternal conversations about building and beautifying churches. I have actually heard three or four clergymen, of the so-called Oxford school, spend nearly the whole of dinner-time in discussing whether or not the covering of the communion table should have a seam in it, each backing his own opinion by a reference to some old monastic book, which, from their conflicting testimony, appeared to be a mass of contradictory instructions and assertions. Don't you agree with me, Lady Laura, that this is extremely absurd?"

"I think it is a great pity," she replied, "when really good and well-meaning people give a handle to others to ridicule things which are not in themselves ridiculous."

"And then," continued Captain Spencer, "what a fine field it is for ostentation and vanity! A man or woman, with some high-sounding title, spends thousands in building, or perhaps only in restoring, a church, and people come miles and miles to look at and admire it, and go away and praise the generosity and the good taste that have effected all this; and the doer of it deems himself a saint as secure of going to heaven as ever did any benighted king or noble of old time, who built and endowed a monastery before his death, to atone for a life of vice and self-indulgence, or for some wholesale massacre to which he was prompted by policy or revenge. I don't pretend to much religion myself; but it strikes me there is little enough of the widow's mite, or of the right hand knowing not what the left hand doeth, in many of our modern church-restorers. But I am quite open to conviction: will you undertake my case, Lady Laura?"

"No," she answered, smiling; "I am not ambitious."

"But, at all events," he added, in a more serious tone, "you cannot deny the truth of *all* I have said."

"But of some part I can," she rejoined; "for instance, I have known more than one case of a 'church-restorer,' as you are pleased to term them, who has neither been proud, nor ostentatious, nor backward in the duty of almsgiving. Still I agree, that in the performance of so noble and glorious a

work as that of raising a temple to God's honour, and bringing wealth and art to bear upon it, there is some temptation to esteem the praise of men at more than its real worth. But this admission," she added earnestly, "can never qualify my admiration for the spirit which I believe generally actuates those who spend their money and time on such objects, instead of squandering both on——But I am speaking rather too warmly. I had in my eye one who, with all his love for beautifying churches, does not deserve your strictures, Captain Spencer ;" and she looked fondly at her brother—that brother, the object of so much pride and affection, now the miserable dupe of such consummate artifice and deceit. Captain Spencer appeared to understand her feelings, and to respect them ; for he only said, "You are quite right, Lady Laura," and was silent. Laura had touched him more than if she had given way to a burst of virtuous indignation, or had answered his taunting remarks in their own spirit. Agnes had been an attentive listener to this conversation ; and as she was seated between Miss Bateman, who did not think it worth while to speak to her, and a gentleman, who rarely spoke to any one, not a word had escaped her. She had already felt drawn towards Laura by the evident predilection which the latter had testified for her ; and with her there was none of that constraint, which, since her rejection of Henry Mordaunt, she could not avoid experiencing in her intercourse with his sisters. Strangely enough, now, a similar feeling, though proceeding from a totally opposite cause, was beginning to spring up in Laura's mind with respect to the Misses Mordaunt : *she* forbore to seek their society, because something within her told her that the childish friendship she had hitherto entertained for their brother was changing into a deeper regard ; while Agnes acted in the same way from a sort of fear that, though their manner to her was kind as ever, they could not feel so warmly towards one who had been the means, however innocently, of wounding and grieving Henry. But as neither Laura nor Agnes knew aught of what was passing in each other's minds with reference to the Mordaunt family, they were daily being drawn together more closely, without caring to inquire why.

Agnes was very much pleased at Laura's reply to Captain Spencer, and ventured to tell her so when we adjourned to

the drawing-room. But I did not hear Laura's answer ; for at that moment Emma came up to discuss the beauties of a new engraving from one of Landseer's celebrated paintings, lately sent from London, and we continued in conversation till we were joined by the gentlemen. I was now half-disposed to relent towards Arthur ; but all such feelings vanished when I observed his manner with Augusta throughout the evening. It was just as kind, friendly, and polite as it had ever been since her arrival at Vernon Hall, and her's was apparently unchanged to him. And the evening wore away ; heavily, gloomily to me, and perhaps to one or two besides—lightly and gaily it passed off to most assembled that night.

The next morning Arthur followed me from the breakfast-room, and said, in a tone which admitted of no dispute—

“I must speak to you at once, Caroline, if you please.”

In silence I led the way into a small apartment on the ground floor, which went by the name of Miss Vernon's room. I seated myself in an easy-chair, and resolved not to be the first to speak. Arthur established himself in another chair close by me, and, taking my hand, he said that my conduct made him very unhappy, especially as he was not conscious of having done any thing to deserve it. This was enough. I turned full round upon him, and asked for an explanation of the scene of yesterday morning, and of his manner to Miss Sutherland in the evening.

With the greatest good-humour, he replied—

“My dearest Caroline, I will tell you all I know of this affair, which is distressing enough to us all without our making each other miserable by mutual distrust and suspicion. I have often told you that, from Sir Francis Sutherland's being for some years a near neighbour of my father's—in fact, an inhabitant of the same terrace in — Park, which possesses one garden common to all—the young Sutherlands were constant playmates of my sisters and myself. The slight acquaintance between our parents ripened gradually into a closer intimacy—I will not say friendship, for that could hardly exist between those so dissimilar—and for several years Sir Francis Sutherland's house was a frequent resort of mine when I was at home for the holidays. When my poor father's lease was out, his widow retired to a

smaller house at Richmond, and our meetings were only occasional, but they occurred often enough to keep up among us all the remembrance of our childish intercourse.

"When Augusta had attained the age of seventeen, she was presented, and introduced into the gay world; and, as I have always told you, the sensation created by her extraordinary beauty surpassed even the expectations of her silly mother. She had always been remarkably kind and cordial in her manner to me, and I found her quite unchanged in this respect by all the admiration she excited, and ever ready to welcome her old friend, for as such I then firmly believed that she considered me. My own heart being so entirely untouched, I suppose, blinded me to the real state of hers. I need scarcely assure you again, Caroline, that I never for one moment felt any thing approaching to love for Miss Sutherland, not even when receiving from her the most flattering marks of distinction; for I had known her long enough to be well aware that she was wanting in some sterling qualities, without which my married life would be wretched. However, as that spring passed away (the spring before the one when first we met at Hartley Grange, Caroline), a faint suspicion at times crossed my mind that Augusta liked me very much, and that, notwithstanding my want of the wealth to which I knew she aspired, I might possibly have won her had I wished to do so. Then I thought what a vain fool I was to imagine that, because a pretty girl was civil to me, she must needs be in love with me; so I behaved to her in my old friendly way, though perhaps my vanity was a little flattered by standing so high in the regard of one whose beauty made her so courted and admired."

Here I suppose I looked uneasy, for Arthur added—

"You see, darling, I am telling you the exact truth, even to the smallest particular; so you have not any excuse for being angry with me. Well, one morning towards the conclusion of the London season, I went to call at Sir Francis Sutherland's house, and was shown into the drawing-room; which was empty; but after waiting a few minutes Augusta came in. She appeared surprised to see me there, and her countenance was rather troubled and discomposed. She shook hands with me as usual, and, casting herself on the sofa, she put her handkerchief to her face, and began to weep. I said, I feared she was not well, and perhaps she would

allow me to ring for her maid, and I would call another day to say good-bye before my departure for the continent. At these words her tears flowed afresh, but she entreated me not to leave her. 'You are one of my oldest friends,' she said; 'and to you I must apply in this emergency. I cannot speak to mamma, for she is in league against me; and Frank is little more than a boy, and could not understand my feelings. Even your sisters, kind as they are, can do nothing for me now; but Arthur, *you* can—you have influence with papa, and you will speak to him in my behalf; will you not?' She paused; but, finding I was silent, she continued—'Arthur, papa and mamma want to force me into a marriage from which my very soul recoils. Two days ago, Sir Christopher Morant told papa he was desperately in love with me; his twenty thousand a-year was of course irresistible, and papa vows I shall marry him, or incur his displeasure for ever. In vain I have begged, and prayed, and assured my father he was not consulting my true happiness in looking only at wealth; he was inexorable, and we parted in anger last night, and this morning I did not dare to meet him, and breakfasted in my own room. Just now I heard the drawing-room door shut, so I came in, but found *you*. Arthur, will you help me?'

"I represented to her as calmly, yet as strongly, as I could, the impossibility of my interference, and the folly of imagining that any thing I could say would have any effect with her father. It never entered my mind to suspect that Augusta was actuated by any other motive than the one she professed in making this disclosure; but the scene of yesterday morning leads me to conclude that she was anxious by this ruse to ascertain the real state of my feelings towards her, and, if they were such as she wished (forgive the vanity of the expression), to elicit an immediate declaration from me, by showing me with what formidable rivals I had to contend. For she added that, in refusing one or two previous offers, she had met with no opposition."

"Then the whole thing was a trumped up story, I suppose?" said I.

"No," replied Arthur; "it was true that Sir Christopher Morant was thoroughly captivated, and that she rejected him: beyond that I know nothing. However, I brought this embarrassing interview to a close as soon as possible; and we parted,

I thought, with a slight shade of coldness in her manner, but with the expression of every good wish on mine. After that morning we saw each other no more till we met at Hartley Grange, the day before the fête. Even the few days we spent together there, convinced me that the report I had heard of Lord Tintern's attachment to Augusta was not ill-founded ; and, as I fully believed that she returned his affection, I hoped she would become all that the wife of such a man ought to be. But, except the congratulations contained in my note to her (which you saw), nothing passed between us on the subject of her engagement till yesterday morning ; when, as I was lounging in the shrubbery, she came up to me, saying, she must intrude on my solitude, as she had hitherto had no opportunity of congratulating me on my great good fortune in having gained your affections, and of offering me her warmest wishes for our happiness. We strolled on together, while I thanked her, and said I must return her congratulations and good wishes. 'Oh,' she said in a careless tone, 'I don't know how it is ; but in most instances the pretty things people are obliged to say on these occasions are such mockeries, are they not ?' 'They may be in some cases,' I answered ; 'certainly not in yours or mine, Augusta.' 'Not in *yours*, if you please,' she rejoined ; 'but in *mine*—oh ! how little we know of each other's hearts, do we, Arthur ?'

"I made some bantering remark on the impossibility of knowing what young ladies would be at, when she reddened, and said, 'Why, surely, Arthur, it can be no news to *you*, that I am giving my hand without my heart ?'

"'If you are really speaking truth, Augusta,' I answered warmly, 'you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself—ashamed of being insensible to the worth of such a man, and still more ashamed of deceiving him so grossly.'

"'At all events, Arthur,' she said, 'I do not see that *you* have any right to reproach me.'

"'Certainly not,' I replied ; 'only the right that you yourself have given me by your uncalled-for declaration of indifference to my friend.'

"She burst into tears, and uttered those words which were overheard by you and Spencer. And now, dearest Caroline, do I stand exonerated in your eyes ?"

"By no means ; for how could you in honour have allowed Lord Tintern to remain in ignorance of what had passed, even

if he had been a perfect stranger to you, instead of your friend? And how dared you, in my presence too, behave last night to Miss Sutherland as if she had done nothing to lower herself in your esteem?"

Arthur's eye flashed, and his face betrayed the agitation and anger which he could not control. He rose from his seat, and, rapidly pacing the room, he said in a tone of sternness which I had never heard from him before—

"No woman shall ever speak thus to me—least of all, the one I am to call my wife. I have made every allowance for the bitter, unkind things you have said to me regarding Agnes, because there I felt I owed you some forbearance—indeed, every compensation which it was in my power to give; but this is too much. I tell you now (and my words are not lightly uttered when once my anger is roused)—I tell you, Caroline, I never will bear with a jealous wife! so beware in time, for Heaven is my witness that I mean what I say, and you will find the truth of it, unless you take warning speedily."

"Arthur," I returned, almost humbly, "forgive me, I was very wrong."

"You were, indeed," he answered coldly.

But he loved me very dearly, and ere long I succeeded in appeasing him; and I asked him, calmly and gently, if he did not think Lord Tintern should know all these things.

"I was very uneasy," said Arthur, "during our ride yesterday; but I resolved to see Augusta once more before I spoke to him on so painful a subject. When I reached home before dinner, I met Augusta in the Hall, and she asked me to come in here with her. She said that she was aware how completely her unguarded confession had thrown her into my power; that the pent-up feeling of years had at last found vent in words, and that she could only trust herself to my generosity. I endeavoured to represent to her, in strong terms, the guilt, the perfidy, and the danger of the course she was now pursuing; and she replied, with seeming earnestness, that she would give all she possessed to recall that morning; that no sign, no word of love for me should ever again escape her; that she would struggle hard to vanquish feelings which both her situation and mine rendered as wicked as they were foolish; that she would solemnly devote her life to forming the happiness of her future husband, of

whose merits and rare devotion to herself she was fully sensible ; and that she would endeavour to atone for her evil conduct, by cultivating every impulse of gratitude and affection which his love could not fail to excite in her. These, she said, were her firm resolves, and her contrition was deep and sincere ; she therefore hoped that I would preserve silence upon what she termed the disgraceful scene of that morning, and entreat you to do the same, that so she might owe to our forbearance the opportunity of retrieving in some measure her past errors, and evincing the sincerity of her penitence by her future conduct. And now, dearest, can we do otherwise than take her at her word ? ”

Before I could answer, we were interrupted.

CHAPTER XII.

THE interruption to our conversation came in the shape of a low knock at the door, given by a hesitating hand, as though the person knew that the room contained those who were not likely to be much pleased at the interruption. However, I said, "Come in!" and Mrs. Mivart appeared. In measured tones she apologised for her intrusion, saying, that she could not otherwise get rid of the importunity of a young lady who seemed to be in terrible distress; and, as far as she could collect from her broken and imperfect English, was most anxious to see a magistrate directly. Mrs. Mivart added—

"I tried to make her understand, miss, that Sir Henry Vernon and Mr. Willis were both gone several miles, to attend the sessions at —, and she then asked if she could see Lady Vernon. I told her, her ladyship was too much of an invalid to see a stranger; but the poor creature was trembling so, and appeared so afflicted, that I said I would just step this way, and ask if you would speak to her. Though, I daresay," continued the housekeeper, as if half-ashamed of the involuntary compassion she had been betrayed into evincing—"I daresay, she is nothing but a regular impostor, being a foreigner too."

"You will see her, Caroline?" asked Arthur.

"Yes!" I answered; "she can come in here, Mrs. Mivart."

Mrs. Mivart went to summon her, evidently pleased at my decision; and Arthur left me for a time, saying, we would resume our conversation later in the day, when both would have had more time for reflection.

The stranger now stood before me, and I immediately recognised the person whom we had seen and conversed with for a few moments at her cottage gate, on the afternoon of

our visit to the Rectory. Her appearance, however, was considerably changed by the improvement in her attire, which had then consisted of old, and somewhat shabby, mourning; now she wore a gown, mantle, and bonnet of black silk, all deeply trimmed with crape, and all looking fresh and new. I have mentioned her before as about thirty, but this day I should have guessed the number of her years to be under that, so much was she altered by the change in her apparel, notwithstanding the agitation and distress visible on every feature. She was certainly not handsome; and when I had seen her before, so still and inanimate, I had scarcely thought her good-looking; but now the flash of her dark eye, and the warm glow that came and went upon her cheek, mantling through her clear, dark skin, invested her with an interest which forbade all idea of her being plain.

I addressed her in French, observing that this was not the first time we had met, and asking if I could be of any service to her.

"I believe you can, mademoiselle," she replied in the same language, which she spoke with tolerable fluency. "At all events, time presses; and, as Sir Henry Vernon and Mr. Willis are both away, I can but try your power and will to serve me."

"Of the latter you need not doubt; of the former I can say nothing till I hear your story."

"It is on a point of law that I am seeking for information, mademoiselle. I know little of the regulations of my own land, and nothing at all of your's. But this is my case: The cottage in which I am living, I rent by the year of Mr. Kidd, whose property it is. I pay my rent regularly every quarter with my own money, and that money is honestly obtained. I am eight-and-twenty, and am leading the quietest possible life, no less from inclination than necessity. Now, under these circumstances, do the laws of your country authorize any one, no matter who it may be, to come and ring at my bell, ask for admittance into my house, and, on my refusing it, to attempt a forcible entry, and to make use of the most violent language, the party in question declaring that he would break in by violence in the dead of night, sooner than be baulked of his desire?"

Here she paused; and I said, I was sure that such proceedings as the person she spoke of threatened to put in

practice, could never be sanctioned by the law ; but that, in case of his being able to establish any plea for entering her cottage, I believed his course would be to apply for a legal warrant for doing so.

"And would he obtain it?" she asked, while her faltering voice and quivering limbs bore witness to her deep anxiety.

"I hardly think he would to-day," I answered, "as all the magistrates are gone to the sessions at —; but I am sure you are tired and faint," and I rang the bell, and ordered some wine and refreshment.

She declined eating, but she swallowed half a glass of wine, and seemed touched by the kindness of my manner. Presently she resumed—

"My illness, mademoiselle, is of the mind, not of the body ; and, at times, I feel as if I could not alone sustain the heavy burden of my secret much longer. For I am incurring a fearful responsibility, but I had scarcely an alternative. Mademoiselle, you feel for me—I see it in your face—I hear it in the tone of your voice—and from the little I have heard from my village neighbours, I am convinced that your family might be safely intrusted with a matter of life and death. Would it be taxing your patience too much to listen to my sad tale?"

I felt strangely interested in the fate of the young woman who stood before me, especially when I connected it in my mind with that of the beautiful boy with whom I had previously seen her ; and her situation, as a stranger in a foreign land, apparently unprotected and forlorn, could not but inspire me with compassion. Besides, there was about her a *je ne sais quoi*, which assured me that, let her former life have been what it might, she was not now imposing upon me. So, after a minute's hesitation, I expressed my willingness to be the confidant of her story. I will relate it in my own words, as her manner of telling it was naturally hurried and disjointed ; and I will give in their proper order many additional particulars, which I was not made acquainted with until a later period, and which at that time were unknown to my informant herself.

Between seven and eight years ago, there resided in a small house, near a market town in one of the midland counties, a gentleman, his wife, and their daughter. The

gentleman, Mr. Protheroe by name, had formerly been a partner in a house of considerable business in London, and had received, as his share in the profits, an income of about ten thousand a-year. But adverse times came—suddenly, as it appeared to those unconcerned in, or unconnected with, merchandise—but not altogether unexpectedly to the merchants themselves. Many an anxious day, many a sleepless night, as his wife could testify, had Mr. Protheroe spent for many months before his ruin was finally consummated; while from the world he strove to hide the slightest suspicion of the real state of affairs. And so his style of living, which had always been on a scale that caused his income to be rated at rather above than below its real amount, remained unaltered. They still inhabited a handsome mansion in a fashionable part of London—Mr. Protheroe still drove to his counting-house each morning in his own well-appointed equipage with its dashing pair of horses—and Mrs. Protheroe's drawing-rooms were still thrown open for the reception of her numerous, and often titled, guests. For Mrs. Protheroe had a little sprinkling of nobility in her blood, being niece to a very poor Scottish lord; and her grand acquaintances, many of them not more abounding in this world's wealth than her own family, agreed, with a condescending kindness, to accept of her merchant husband's hospitality.

At last the crash came; the house was declared insolvent, with scarce a hope that either of the three partners would be able to bring things around, and start afresh. The creditors were clamorous, and imperative in their demands; and six weeks had not elapsed before Mr. and Mrs. Protheroe and their child found themselves cast upon the wide world, with about four hundred a-year for their future subsistence; that small sum being secured to the wife by her marriage settlement.

What was to be done? Mrs. Protheroe was for migrating to the continent, and there combining as much as possible of pleasure and gaiety with the economy, from the exercise of which not even a residence in Germany could save them; but on this one point her husband was inflexible. He would not quit his native country—he hated and detested foreign parts and foreigners; and his future life was likely to be miserable enough, without the additional vexation of being constantly surrounded by a set of fools and

scoundrels. In vain Mrs. Protheroe represented that, by taking up their residence in another land, he would not be exposed to the hard trial of meeting in his fallen state with those who had only known him in the day of his prosperity ; that abroad it was no disgrace for English people to be poor ; and that, in the countries he despised, wealth was not the only test of merit—the only standard by which human beings were valued. Finding him insensible to all her eloquence, she brought forward her last, and what she hoped would prove her strongest, plea (for she knew Mr. Protheroe's devoted attachment to his child) ; namely, the education of their daughter, now a girl of about thirteen. This, she urged, could not be properly attended to in a secluded valley in Devonshire, or amid the mountain fastnesses of Wales ; but at a foreign town they could procure her the best masters at a moderate expense, and, in a few years' time, introduce her into a higher class of society, than with their scanty means they could ever hope to attain in their own country. If any thing had been wanting to confirm Mr. Protheroe in his former decision, it was supplied by this last argument of his wife's. His daughter to be brought up abroad—taught to detest the land of her birth, the only land in the world worth belonging to—made a foreigner of, and ending all by marrying some penniless scamp of a German count, and breaking his heart in his old age ! No ! that he could prevent—that should never be !

Then what were they to do ? Mrs. Protheroe's family were too needy themselves to afford any assistance ; and her fashionable acquaintances, who had frequented the house merely because the master was wealthy, and could give costly banquets, and contribute to their amusement, showed not the slightest disposition to come forward now, and ere long appeared to have forgotten the very name and existence of the fallen Protheroes. But they were unexpectedly rescued from this dilemma by the gratitude of a man for whom Mr. Protheroe had once done a trifling service—trifling it then seemed, and performed at little cost or trouble to himself, but it had been the means of giving Mr. Barton a fresh start in life ; and, although he had for some years past been a prosperous man, he had never forgotten his obligations to his benefactor. He wrote to Mr. Protheroe, saying, that he was reluctant to intrude himself upon him at a time when he

must have so much to think of and to do ; but he could not resist the strong desire he felt to ask if it were possible for him in any way to be of the least use to Mr. Protheroe. He said, he heard that the latter talked of establishing himself in the country ; and, if this were true, he would greatly oblige Mr. Barton by renting a house of him, and thus securing him a good tenant. He told Mr. Protheroe that he was the owner of several cottages in the neighbourhood of the town of —, in Warwickshire ; and that, though he regretted the accommodation they afforded was not better, he hoped one of them might be rendered fit for the reception of Mr. Protheroe and his family.

The fallen merchant was gratified by Mr. Barton's thoughtful kindness, and was not insensible to the delicate manner in which his offer was conveyed ; and, without hesitation, he resolved upon accepting it. He was secretly glad to have some good excuse for avoiding a Welsh village, or perhaps a glen with no village at all. In Warwickshire he would feel himself more at home ; and, indeed, the vicinity even of a small country town was preferable, in the eyes of a man of his habits, to a more retired situation. As to his wife, she, poor woman, professed a total indifference on the subject, declaring, that since she was doomed to languish for the remainder of her days in rural seclusion, whatever spot might be fixed upon would be all the same to her. It would not be long, she hoped and believed, that she should trouble any of them, and she could drag out her short span of life any where. This she called the language of resignation, though to others it seemed rather that of sullen submission ; but she was little fitted to weather the storms of adversity, and now that she was disappointed in the only project which promised her any consolation, she had nothing left to hope for. So Mr. Protheroe met with no further opposition from her ; and from his daughter his wishes received the most cordial approval. She was still too young to enter heartily into her mother's plans for her future gaiety and establishment in life ; and to her the idea of the country was one of unmixed enjoyment. For at thirteen she realized little of the privations to which their fallen fortunes must expose one, bred as she had been in the lap of luxury and enjoyment ; and she laughed gaily, and turned a deaf ear to her father's warnings of the difference they must make in their style of

living. She regarded as mere idle words the threat of parting with her pony and groom, and dressing henceforth with a due attention to plainness and economy. She was especially pleased at the prospect of taking up their residence in Warwickshire; for she had once been staying with her parents at a large house in that county, and her impression of her sojourn there was a most agreeable one.

And into Warwickshire they went, after the interval of a few weeks, which were spent by the Protheroes at the house of their future landlord, and by Mr. Barton, in doing all that money and taste could effect, to render their future dwelling more commodious and prettier. Small he knew it must always be; but comfortable, and even pleasing to the eye, he thought he could make it; and he succeeded so well, that the first exclamation of Lucy and her father on entering their little drawing-room, was one of surprise on his part, and of pleasure on hers. It was on a beautiful evening, early in June, that they took possession of their new home. Tired, hot, and dusty, they were when they reached it; and the cool shade of some neighbouring trees, and the Venetian blinds excluding the still fervid rays of the sun, looked inviting to at least two out of the three weary travellers. The furniture was not massive nor handsome, but there was no lack of it, and its light and elegant style assorted well with the size and design of the cottage. The little garden in front was already rich in spring flowers, and creepers were climbing the walls, and promising to Lucy the pleasure of gathering roses and honeysuckles out of the window. Behind was a well-stocked piece of kitchen-garden, large enough to supply their wants. Several little articles of luxury, and even of fashion, the loss of which Mr. Barton had heard Mrs. Protheroe lamenting during her stay with him, had been silently procured by him, and were disposed about the different rooms; and two maid-servants, adapted to the place, and who, he thought, might be trusted not to impose upon their unknowing mistress, had been engaged by him, and were already at their post.

Mrs. Protheroe was not a woman of much feeling, and could not therefore be expected to be keenly alive to the claims of gratitude; but even she could not be altogether insensible to these marks of attention to her wants and wishes; and when they entered the dining-room, and found an excellent repast ready spread for them, she exclaimed—

"Well, this is really very kind of Mr. Barton!"

The rent, of course, was very trifling—almost nominal; but Mr. Protheroe had insisted upon paying a small sum. Not many months, however, elapsed, before they were released even from this demand upon their income, by the death of Mr. Barton, who left the cottage to Mr. Protheroe, together with a legacy of a thousand pounds. He bequeathed the bulk of his savings to his sister's son, for he had died childless, and his wife had preceded him to the grave.

"Well!" said Mrs. Protheroe, as they sat at the breakfast-table on the morning which brought the melancholy announcement of the death of their kind friend; "well, this puts the finishing stroke to our troubles! It is not enough that we are doomed to wither out our lives in a little roadside cottage, without a single amusement or the means of procuring any; but now we must lose the only person who has shown the slightest inclination to do any thing for us. I had looked forward to his asking Lucy and myself to stay with him in town when she should be of an age to mix in society; but, of course, I am to have nothing more I wish for in this world. If we had followed my plan, and gone to live abroad, I dare say we should have been surrounded by kind friends and neighbours by this time, instead of having not an acquaintance with whom I could suffer Lucy to associate. *My* daughter to be the companion of the Misses Clay and the Misses Griffin!" (mentioning the families of the lawyer and the apothecary in the adjoining town.) "No, I hope I have not fallen quite so low as that yet! But how much do you say poor Mr. Barton has left you, Mr. Protheroe?"

"A thousand pounds, my dear."

"And who has got all the rest?"

"With the exception of a few trifling legacies, his nephew is his sole heir."

And time passed on, and brought its usual changes with it, though to the Protheroes they came not in the shape of strange or startling events. Mr. Protheroe was an easy, good-tempered man, liberal in the main, though his mercantile life had imbedded him with some calculating habits, which were not altogether useless now, as they acted in a measure as a check on the thoughtless extravagance of his wife. She seemed to think it very hard that she was to be stinted in her dress or personal expenditure; but Mr. Protheroe, though

generally willing to yield for the sake of peace and quiet, could be firm sometimes, as he had proved by his resolute opposition to quitting his own country ; and if only for the sake of his child, he was determined that Mrs. Frotheroe should not incur large debts which he had no means of paying. He was not a man of enlarged mind or cultivated understanding ; and though he was superior to his wife in having some vague notions of religion (while she was almost entirely devoid of a thought on the subject), yet they were scanty and confused, and had little effect upon his heart.

She was a vain, selfish woman, who, though she had never had any pretensions to beauty, had prided herself on being an ultra-fashionable and well-bred person. Her manners in society were those of a lady ; but the *gentility* on which she so piqued herself, extended not to the mind—there all was low, vulgar, and sordid. Sordid, I mean, in the sense of grudging the smallest donation to one from whom she had no hope of receiving a return ; while she was lavish in the gratification of every whim, and the heaping together of every luxury. And the character she had borne in prosperity followed her into adversity, and reduced her to a pitiable object ; her temper soured by privation, and her happiness wrecked by the loss of that which to her was every thing.

Lucy could scarcely have been said to resemble either of her parents ; though she inherited a large share of her father's good-nature and kindness of disposition, joined to no small portion of her mother's love of expense and display. She was growing up into an extremely pretty girl, and was keenly alive to this fact, the consciousness of which gave her the greatest pleasure ; and the vanity natural to her was zealously nurtured by her mother. But the amiability of her disposition prevented her from becoming disagreeable ; indeed, on the contrary, her manners were remarkably lady-like and winning ; and her real talent for music and drawing was improved as far as was practicable by the masters residing in the neighbouring town. At first she had murmured, and even rebelled a little, at the absence of her accustomed means of enjoyment ; but she was of a cheerful nature, and anxious to do all she could to smooth her father's troubled brow ; while yet she retained so lively a remembrance of the delights that wealth could give, as to make her very willing to embrace any opportunity that might one day

offer itself to her of recovering them. And so, for more than three years, Mr. Protheroe's family "vegetated on," to use his wife's expression: he took his daily walk to the town, and read the newspaper, and perhaps brought home some book from the circulating library, into which he rarely looked himself, but which was eagerly devoured by Lucy, and, *faute de mieux*, by her mother, always supposing the book in question to be a novel.

One cold snowy morning in January, at the end of the time I have mentioned, while Mr. Protheroe was walking backwards and forwards, with his hands in his pockets, from the door to the window, anxiously watching for any sign of the sky clearing sufficiently to enable him to go out without the absolute certainty of making tenfold worse an already bad cold—while Mrs. Protheroe was endeavouring to doze on a sofa drawn close to the fire, herself almost concealed by the thick folds of a rich ermine cloak, a relic of former splendour—and while Lucy was at her piano (that, too, the gift of their departed friend), trying to master some difficult passages in an Italian song—a ring was heard at their garden gate. An event so unusual, and, especially, occurring on a morning when it seemed unlikely that any one should voluntarily leave the shelter and warmth of their own home, could not but produce some excitement. Mr. Protheroe instantly returned to the window; and even Lucy was tempted, by the sudden emergency of the case, to make a very unfashionable display of curiosity, and actually stopped short in the middle of a long shake, and turned on her music-stool to ascertain who the unlooked-for guest could be. It soon appeared, however, that he was no less unknown than unlooked for; but he was so muffled up in his great-coat that all they could learn by their first inquiring glance was the fact of his being a stranger. The short space of time that elapsed while he dismounted from his horse, and followed the maid to the drawing-room door, was long enough to invest him in the lively imagination of sixteen with all the attributes of a handsome and fascinating hero of romance, driven to seek shelter from the pitiless storm beneath their humble roof, and requiring but the first half-hour to be captivated for life, to surrender himself her willing slave, and to lay himself and his riches at her feet. For all the heroes that visited Lucy in her waking dreams

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were rich—most of them noble ; she had no idea of the delights of “love in a cottage,” but a very due appreciation of the large fortunes which, sooner or later, invariably fall to the lot of the young gentlemen she was accustomed to read of in romances, notwithstanding the little stress that is laid in such works upon the value of worldly possessions. It was fortunate for Lucy that her natural tact prevented her vanity from displaying itself to an absurd or unpleasing extent, and had only the effect of imparting to her manner something of coquetry, which in so very pretty a girl would be attractive to many, and which few would be uncharitable enough to censure harshly. But be this as it might, the appearance of the gentleman at once shattered all Miss Protheroe’s romantic visions. He was young, it is true ; but he was neither handsome, nor interesting, nor very tall ; and, so far from evincing any sign of an immediate intention to be dazzled by her, he scarcely looked at her for the first five minutes, and only by a bow, at their first introduction by Mr. Protheroe, did he give any intimation of being aware of her presence. He made himself known to them as the nephew of the late Mr. Barton ; and said that, having come into Warwickshire to look after what property belonged to him there, he had been most anxious to pay his respects to them, hoping for his uncle’s sake that he should not be considered as an intruder.

“Far from it, I assure you,” said Mrs. Protheroe in her blandest tones, for she was extremely pleased to make the acquaintance of a young man whom she believed to be rich ; “on the contrary, I assure you it is quite a treat to see a friend here—a treat which rarely falls to our share in this dreary solitude. Adversity has no friends,” continued the lady, who was fresh from the perusal of a sentimental novel.

“Oh, mamma !” exclaimed Lucy, feeling how peculiarly ungracious this remark must appear to their visitor ; “I am sure we have no right to say so ! Consider how deeply we are indebted to Mr. Barton—he was a true friend, indeed.”

The stranger was struck by Lucy’s earnest manner of uttering these words ; and probably the agreeable impression they produced was not lessened by a survey of her pretty face, now animated by the warmth with which she had been speaking. Mr. Hartwell (for so was he called) made no

reply to what had been said either by mother or daughter ; but he remained for a few minutes, during which he gave every possible evidence of being thoroughly a gentleman, and one possessed of a warm and benevolent heart ; but it was no less apparent that he was shy and reserved, and seemed to have a difficulty in expressing himself where he really felt most strongly. He shook hands at parting with Mr. and Mrs. Protheroe, merely bowing to Lucy ; but he did not go without receiving and accepting an invitation to join their family party at dinner the next day.

The evening passed at the cottage was a most eventful one to Mr. Hartwell ; for when he returned to the little inn in which he had taken up his quarters, he could not disguise from himself that he had left his heart behind him in Mr. Protheroe's drawing-room. But, alas ! he could not flatter himself that he was carrying away with him one in exchange. He was well-read and sensible ; but his talents were without brilliancy, and had little charm for Lucy. He had yielded to Mr. and Mrs. Protheroe's pressing offer of taking up his abode with them while he remained in the neighbourhood. When he had departed for the night, Mrs. Protheroe asked her husband if Mr. Hartwell had said any thing which could lead him to form a guess as to the amount of his fortune.

"There is no guessing in the case, my dear," replied Mr. Protheroe ; "Mr. Hartwell told me unasked, that, from what Mr. Barton had left, he derived an income of six hundred a-year."

"Only six hundred a-year !" repeated Mrs. Protheroe in dismay ; "why, I thought Mr. Barton had accumulated at least three times as much."

"Young Hartwell might have been in a fair way of being a rich man by this time," continued her husband, "if he had not had such an insuperable aversion to business. He told me it was a source of great regret to his poor uncle, and no wonder !"

"And Lucy will have four at our deaths," said Mrs. Protheroe, pursuing aloud the train of her own ideas ; "a thousand a-year ; well, it would be better than nothing, but it is not much, and Lucy is still young."

The young lady looked up from her book, and burst out laughing. "My dear mamma, indeed you are giving your-

self a great deal of unnecessary trouble by these calculations ! If Mr. Hartwell had six thousand a-year, I would not marry him for the next ten years, at all events ; and, as it is, I should not think of him for one instant."

Could poor Mr. Hartwell's thoughts have been read at that moment, I believe they would have been something as follows—

"What a lovely young creature is Miss Protheroe, and evidently as good as she is pretty ! How earnestly I wish I and my fortune were worthier of her acceptance, for I fear my chance of winning her is a very poor one ! I am quite aware that I can never deserve her ; but, if she will ever bless me by consenting to become my wife, it shall be the study of my future life to make her happy."

It might have comforted him a little, could he have seen that Mr. Protheroe looked rather cross at what he considered his daughter's silly speech. However, Mr. Hartwell came the next day, all unconscious of Lucy's determination, though she was not equally ignorant of his predilection for her. It had never occurred to her to suppose that she could not captivate him if she chose to take the least trouble about it ; but she was surprised, and perhaps rather pleased, to see how instantaneously this man, whom she had deemed so insensible, had fallen a victim to her charms without the slightest effort on her part. A month passed on, and still Mr. Hartwell was at the cottage, having each week found an excuse for staying another ; once in the slowness of the workmen, whose alterations he had come partly to inspect ; and once in a very bad cold, which almost incapacitated him from travelling while the weather continued so unusually severe. Nor did he stay as an unwelcome guest ; Mr. Protheroe really liked and esteemed him, and observed with pleasure his growing attachment to his daughter, who, he hoped, had already repented her foolish words. Even Mrs. Protheroe was getting reconciled to the idea of Lucy becoming Mrs. Hartwell ; because, as she said, there was no time like the present, especially when there was so little prospect of better things.

And Lucy—what were her feelings on the subject ? She had learnt to like Mr. Hartwell extremely—nay, more, to feel a strong regard and friendship for him, and to set a high value on his good opinion ; she took great pleasure in

his society, notwithstanding the difference in their dispositions and tastes, which was perhaps too marked and decided to have allowed of their union being prudent or desirable. Did she love him? No, she did not—she feared she could not. For, though Lucy had no idea of the depth and fervency of her lover's attachment—though she knew not that his very existence was bound up in her, and that he lived on from day to day with scarcely a thought beyond the ardent, and at times despairing, hope of winning her; yet she read enough of his heart to feel convinced that the disappointment in store for him would be a cruel one. Was it in store for him, then? Could not she be happy in his love, and learn by slow degrees to return it?

While matters continued in this uncertain state, Mr. Protheroe was called to London for two or three days; and, while there, he heard from a friend of Mr. Hartwell's, that the fortune originally left him by his uncle had been twelve hundred a-year, but that he had voluntarily deprived himself of half this sum in favour of a niece of Mr. Barton's wife, who had been several years with her husband in Australia, and had of late kept up but little communication with her friends in England. Indeed, the last six letters Mrs. Barton had addressed to her, had been returned unopened, and she was believed to have died. Her husband not taking the trouble to announce the event, did not surprise her aunt (her nearest remaining relation) at all, for he was an unqualified ruffian; and, in truth, it was not death, but distressed circumstances, and an unwillingness to expose her misery, which had imbued her with a false pride, and restrained her from applying to friends who had so highly disapproved of her marriage. Besides, she preferred that her aunt should suppose her to be no more, rather than be aware of the wretched life she was leading; and when, at length, her husband's death released her from the hardest part of her sufferings, and she returned to England with six children, it was to find that her uncle and aunt were laid in the grave, and their fortune inherited by another. She was all but penniless, and her children were entirely dependent upon her; and when young Mr. Hartwell hastened to her, and spoke to her, not in high-flown terms, of the renunciation and self-sacrifice he was about to make, but told her that he and all others must consider half his late uncle's savings to be hers by right, she

did not—perhaps she hardly could—refuse to take the money. Mr. Hartwell had not breathed a word of this to any one, but the widow had spoken gratefully to several persons of what he had so readily and willingly resigned to her ; and so the knowledge of it had come round to Mr. Protheroe's ears. With all her love of wealth and luxury, Mr. Hartwell rose tenfold in Miss Protheroe's estimation when she heard this anecdote of him, and he had occupied a high place in it before.

Another week passed away, and at the end of it Mr. Hartwell felt that he must take his departure ; but he felt, also, that he had not resolution to go without ascertaining his fate. So, one morning, he took the opportunity of being alone with Lucy in the dining-room, where he was giving her her last drawing lesson ; for he was an excellent draftsman, and had delighted in doing his utmost to improve the real taste Lucy possessed for an art he valued so highly. He proposed, and was accepted. Lucy made no protestations of ardent love ; but told him that his good opinion gratified her exceedingly, and that she would become his wife, and do her very best to make him happy. He was by no means fully prepared for a favourable answer ; for, though he knew little of young ladies, he could not but fear that her manner to him had ever been too frank and cordial to admit the idea of love. His joy was deep, indeed ; deep, as the emotions of silent, thoughtful men so often are—in whom the outward veil of coldness and reserve but shrouds the feelings too sacred in their estimation to be loudly or frequently uttered.

And Lucy bade him adieu the next day ; not as the friend of a few weeks, whom she might or might not see again ; but as her affianced husband, with whom she was to pass her future life. And when he was gone, she sought the retirement of her own chamber, and wept. But why did she weep ? Was it from inconsolable grief at her lover's absence, which he had promised her should not exceed a fortnight ? No, her tears flowed from another source. She had accepted Mr. Hartwell without really loving him ; and, let her reason with herself as she would—let her repeat again and again that she liked and esteemed him far, far beyond any one she had ever known—that she *must* be happy with him ; yet she could not bring her heart honestly to rejoice in the prospect before her, or convince herself that she had acted altogether

rightly by him. But she was somewhat consoled by her father's great delight at her engagement—a delight, to do him justice, which proceeded more from his strong sense of Mr. Hartwell's worth than from any sordid motive. Mrs. Protheroe had already begun to amuse herself with speculations on the amount of Lucy's *trousseau*, and calculations as to how much they could possibly contrive to spend on that and the wedding without quite ruining themselves. Mr. Hartwell returned punctually at the end of the specified fortnight, and remained with them a month; and during that time, Lucy, who had no other attachment to interfere with her growing regard for him, became much more reconciled to her lot in life, and even began to look upon herself as a fortunate woman in being blessed with so devoted a lover.

There was one subject, however, in which their difference of opinion was a source of real distress to Mr. Hartwell, and that subject was religion. His own views were particularly strong and decided; and it is only due to him to say that his faith was the standard of his practice; and that, notwithstanding what many would have termed his extraordinary strictness with respect to his own conduct, he possessed a large share of that charity which thinketh no evil, and makes every allowance for the faults and weaknesses of others. And so we generally find that those who live most truly and steadily with the one object before their eyes, of doing their duty in great things and in small, are ever the most really merciful towards others; partly, because charity holds a foremost place in the hearts of the best and wisest; and partly, perhaps, because their greater knowledge of themselves has given them a deeper insight into their own infirmity and need of forgiveness. But Mr. Hartwell could probably have made more excuses for the faults of a stranger than for those of his beloved Lucy; and when he heard her, the first Sunday they passed together after their engagement, give a very decided yawn after breakfast, and say that she did not feel much disposed to go to church that morning, he turned round to her, and asked, as she thought sternly, whether she was unwell?

"Oh, no!" she answered; "but I am rather cold, and you know it is a good half-mile or more to church, and I can read at home instead. Won't you stay with me?"

"Certainly not ; and you will distress me very much if you do not accompany me."

"Oh ! then, I will go, by all means," she replied, with great good-humour ; and she left the room to prepare. But Lucy always took some time in adorning herself on a Sunday, the only day on which she was at all likely to be seen ; and, before she was nearly ready, she heard the voice of Mr. Hartwell on the stairs, calling out to her that it was quite time to set off. So she made haste, according to her sense of the term ; but when she went down to the drawing-room, where her father was reading the newspaper, and her mother reclining on the sofa, she found Mr. Hartwell pacing up and down the room, evidently annoyed at her not having been ready sooner.

"We have not a minute to spare, Lucy," he said ; "as it is, I am afraid we shall be very late."

"Indeed, I think not," she answered ; "besides, if we are a little late, it does not signify. You know it is only the clergyman and clerk, and the school children, who are obliged to be so very punctual."

As they walked rapidly along, Lucy upbraided Mr. Hartwell with being so silent and so cross, after she had come to church on purpose to please him. He tried to explain to her that that was not the motive which ought to take her to the House of God, and that he had been exceedingly pained and grieved at what had occurred since breakfast. Lucy did not clearly understand what he meant, but was inclined to be a little angry ; however, as they had now reached the church door, all further discussion was necessarily suspended. It was the first time they had been at church together ; for, during Mr. Hartwell's former visit, the weather had been really such as to preclude Lucy, who was not very strong, from going. Here she annoyed him again, by neither kneeling, nor repeating the responses, and giving other small tokens of her attention being little fixed upon the service or the sermon. For the latter there might be some excuse ; as the preaching of their clergyman, Mr. Lewis, was of the lowest order, and delivered in a way that made his words almost as inaudible as their meaning would probably have been unintelligible. Mr. Lewis did not hunt, shoot, nor go to balls, and yet he managed to neglect his parish more effectually than if he had been guilty of all three. He had

called twice on the Protheroes, who occasionally on Sundays, when it was neither too hot nor too cold, made their appearance at church once in the day—that is to say, Mr. Protheroe and his daughter did ; for Mrs. Protheroe had so long declared herself unequal to the exertion, that it never occurred to any one to think of her joining in the public worship of her Maker.

In the afternoon Mr. Hartwell asked Lucy to accompany him again, but this she said she was too tired to do ; and besides, as to going to church more than once in the day, the notion seemed to her quite preposterous.

It will readily be believed that, to a man of Mr. Hartwell's very serious views and feelings, these ideas on the part of his future wife were grievous indeed ; and he laboured hard during that month to eradicate them, and to implant principles in accordance with his own. Had he made—or rather suffered himself to show her that he made—a little more allowance for her extreme youth and defective education, he would probably have met with greater success ; as it was, Lucy could not but think him often harsh and stern, and fidgety about trifles ; and though she was not altogether untouched by his arguments, or by the earnestness with which they were delivered, she generally yielded, more from the wish to please, and to avoid disputing, than from any firm or settled conviction of the importance and the necessity of attending to what he said. So he grew in her esteem more than in her affection ; and she learned to fear his censure without deeming herself fully deserving of it. Like Lord Tiutern, Mr. Hartwell erred in unconsciously expecting perfection in the woman he loved ; but, unlike him, he was not so dazzled and captivated as to be blinded to her faults ; on the contrary, as his love for Lucy strengthened, if possible, from day to day, from day to day he became more keenly alive to her least error or failing. He was injudicious in insisting on some trifles of no real moment, when he had better have endeavoured only to imbue her with the high principle which would have enabled her to form a right judgment for herself in these smaller matters. But, with all this, he was a tender and fond lover, anticipating her lightest wish or desire, whenever he could do so conscientiously ; most careful of her health, which was far from being robust ; and anxious to spare her any unnecessary trouble


or fatigue. He made her some very handsome presents, which alone redeemed him in the eyes of Mrs. Protheroe from the charge of being a madman or an enthusiast, so little could she understand his character or ideas. However, she trusted to Lucy's influence to banish all this nonsense when once they were united, and to restore him to his right senses.

CHAPTER XIII.

ABOUT six weeks after Lucy's engagement, she was attacked by a cold and cough, which, though they seemed trifling in themselves, ought not to have been neglected in one whose chest was always disposed to be delicate, and would have been carefully attended to if Mr. Hartwell had been with her. But unfortunately for her, both in the immediate results of such neglect, and in those which lay beyond, and which no human wisdom could have foreseen, her ailments were suffered to take their own course; and the consequence was, that, on returning one afternoon in a bitter March wind from a walk to the neighbouring town, she felt so poorly as to be obliged to go to bed, and the next day was seriously ill with a violent attack of inflammation. Medical assistance was summoned, and Mr. Hartwell written to; but he was at that time in a distant part of England, and the attack, from its very violence, was one which must decide her fate before he could arrive. But youth and a skilful doctor were on her side; and when Mr. Hartwell alighted at the cottage-gate, having travelled with more expedition than even Mr. Protheroe had supposed possible, he had the inexpressible happiness of being assured that his beloved Lucy's illness had taken a favourable turn, and that she was pronounced to be out of any immediate danger. The medical man had dreaded the effect of the first meeting with Mr. Hartwell on Lucy's weakened frame; but, had he known how calmly she received him, and how tranquil and composed was her pleasure at seeing him, he would not have feared any thing like a relapse on paying his visit the next morning. He found her steadily progressing, and so she continued to do; but the spring threatened to be a cold one, and her severe illness had left a delicacy which rendered a

milder air most desirable. Hastings was fixed upon, and Mr. Hartwell preceded them there, in order to secure warm and comfortable apartments, and get all ready for their reception. Lucy arrived from her journey, tired and exhausted, and she could not but feel gratified at the many little nameless tokens which awaited her of his care and thought for her. She had been touched, too, by the deep emotion he had testified during her illness; and when, after remaining a week with her at Hastings, and seeing her improve in health and strength daily, he was obliged to leave her for some time, she was perhaps nearer feeling for him something akin to love than she had ever been before. Mr. Protheroe accompanied Mr. Hartwell as far as London, having accepted a cordial invitation to visit an old friend, who had been abroad when the merchant fell into trouble; and the daughter and mother were left to the enjoyment of sea-breezes and marine delights. As Lucy grew stronger, she was able to take some of the beautiful walks with which the neighbourhood of Hastings abounds; and as Mrs. Protheroe had little taste for the charms of nature, and always preferred the parade and the shops, her daughter enjoyed her rambles unaccompanied by her, and sometimes without her maid.

On one of these latter occasions, as she was descending a hill about two miles from the town, she came suddenly, at a sharp turn in the pathway, upon two gentlemen seated on the bank. It was a bright sunny afternoon, and so warm, that Lucy, being rather tired by the longest walk she had taken since her illness, had herself been tempted to rest awhile, and was now making the best of her way home. The pathway was very narrow; and, as Lucy had come close upon them without either party having any previous warning, they rose, and, bowing, drew aside to let the young lady pass. She slightly returned the salutation, wondering, as she was sometimes guilty of doing when she saw strangers, whether they admired her very much. She would certainly have been satisfied had she known the extent of the admiration her beauty had excited in at least one of the gentlemen, who, being a foreigner, had a very strong appreciation of the brightness of English complexions. He turned to his companion with an exclamation of delight at the fair girl, who he said had so much of "*la beauté du diable*," as the blonde style has been described in French. Lucy, from the momen-



tary glance she had bestowed upon the two gentlemen, had singled out this one as being very striking in appearance ; and, as she pursued her path homewards, she wondered who he was, for she had not yet seen him among the loungers on the parade at Hastings. She was by this time out of their sight ; but she had still nearly a mile and a half to walk, and each step she took brought with it an additional sense of fatigue and weariness. She could not bear the idea of sitting down again to rest, as she thought the gentlemen would probably return to Hastings by this route, and it would then appear as if she wished to be overtaken by them. So she walked on, as quickly as her failing strength would allow, for another half-mile, till her feeling of utter exhaustion overcame all her feminine scruples, and she sank, rather than sat, down upon the nearest spot of rising ground. She had indeed overtaxed her enfeebled powers ; and, notwithstanding all her efforts to rally and shake off the fainting fit which she felt stealing over her, she was soon prostrate on the bank in a state of total insensibility.

The next thing she was conscious of, before she could open her eyes, was a confused murmuring sound in her ear ; and at length she heard a voice speaking in a foreign accent, and saying—"What a beautiful young creature !" And, in the tones of her own land, she heard the reply—"Much too young and too beautiful to be allowed to take these long solitary rambles."

On recovering herself, she found that the two gentlemen (of course those whom she had previously passed) had raised her head, which was now supported by the bank. She sat up and attempted to stand ; but this was beyond her power. She felt all the awkwardness of her situation as she thanked them for coming to her aid, and declared herself able now to proceed without assistance. But they were not at all disposed to add to her embarrassment, though of course they could not leave her fainting by the roadside ; and the Englishman said that, if she would favour them with her address, one of them would repair to her abode, and fetch a vehicle to convey her home, while the other would remain with her. Under the circumstances, and with no one else in sight, Lucy had no alternative but to accept the offer, which was made in a most gentlemanlike and respectful manner ; and the Englishman stayed with her, while the

Italian (for such he was) went on to Hastings. He found Mrs. Protheroe at her apartments, and rather wondering at her daughter's prolonged absence ; and, when informed of the cause, she thought it necessary to display a good deal of interesting agitation. A fly was soon procured, and Mrs. Protheroe and her new acquaintance stepped into it, and drove rapidly to the spot where Lucy and the Englishman were awaiting them. Miss Protheroe's companion had been rather taciturn, only speaking when politeness seemed to require that he should ask how she was feeling ; and, of course, she had not been disposed to originate any subjects of conversation with a perfect stranger. Lucy was soon seated in the fly ; and her companion, after bestowing a sneering look upon the little scene of delight got up by Mrs. Protheroe at "her darling being restored to her," stated his intention of walking back to Hastings, leaving to his friend the more congenial task of escorting the ladies home.

During the short drive from and to the town, the acquaintance progressed considerably. The Italian told them that he was called the Marchese Monti ; that he was a Lucchese by birth, and that what property he possessed lay in the territory of Lucca ; but that his residence was at Florence, and during the summer at an old place in the Appenines. Mrs. Protheroe had once passed several months in Italy previous to her marriage, and had ascertained that the Lucchese nobility were generally wealthier than those of the neighbouring states—at least, that there was a probability of the former having some fortune ; and the knowledge of this, joined to her natural predilection for foreigners, and the really courteous and agreeable manner of the Marchese, disposed her to look upon him with very favourable eyes. And when, on alighting at Mrs. Protheroe's apartments, he declined entering again then, but respectfully asked her permission to call the next day and inquire after the young lady, the mother acquiesced most graciously in his wish, and said it would give her much pleasure to see him.

"What a charming man !" was her first exclamation to Miss Protheroe when they were alone together ; "so distinguished in his appearance and manners, and so bewitching in every way !"

She paused, but her daughter made no remark ; so Mrs. Protheroe went on—

"I'm sure I don't know what your papa will say, Lucy, to our making acquaintance with a foreigner, and in his absence, too ; but, under the circumstances, we could not in any way avoid it. No doubt he will think we have picked up some adventurer ; but, with all his prejudices, I am convinced they would give way could he once see this gentleman."

Mrs. Protheroe ran on in a similar strain for some time longer ; alternately lamenting her husband's absurd opinions, which she declared to proceed entirely from ignorance ; and singing the praises of the Marchese, who she had made up her mind was every thing that was most charming. Lucy remained silent, which her mother attributed to her fatigue ; though the real cause of her making no reply to Mrs. Protheroe's observations was, that she concurred too fully in them to be much inclined to express her feelings on the subject.

The next morning Mrs. Protheroe had ascertained from her maid the triumphant particulars, that the Marchese Monti was staying at the Castle Hotel, with a handsome equipage and a retinue of servants that would not have disgraced an English nobleman ; and that he was on visiting terms with most of the best families at St. Leonards, where adventurers were little likely to meet with encouragement.

"I thought as much," observed Mrs. Protheroe, as she and her daughter met at the breakfast-table ; "and, take my word for it, his fortune would not be overstated at two or three thousand a-year. So much for his being an adventurer !"

"But no one who had seen him could suppose that he was, dear mamma," said Miss Protheroe.

"I really don't know, my love, what people do not suppose—chiefly for the pleasure of contradicting one, too ! The world is so ill-natured, so censorious. I don't think I can touch a morsel this morning, Lucy, my nerves were so completely upset yesterday by your accident ; but I will just try two or three of those prawns."

Mrs. Protheroe ended by consuming the contents of the plate, besides bread and butter *ad libitum* ; and after remarking what shameful cheats the Hastings people were, to charge sixpence for about half-a-dozen prawns, she said she felt a good deal better ; and by the time the sound of wheels, followed by a double knock, was heard, Mrs.

Protheroe was in the highest spirits. Lucy showed no sign of being at all interested in the expected visit, beyond a slight change of colour as steps became audible on the staircase; it is true she had been sitting for nearly half an hour, with her pen in her hand and the paper before her, intending to begin a letter to Mr. Hartwell, for which no words seemed to come; but she attributed her listlessness to her extreme fatigue of the day before, and not to the pre-occupied state of mind which was the real cause of it, and made her feel reluctant to write just then. However, of course, writing was out of the question now; and in a moment's time their new acquaintance stood before them. With a tact which an Englishman would hardly have shown, he was careful to make his first inquiry after the health of Mrs. Protheroe before he turned to her daughter, the real object of his solicitude. For his dreams had been of the blue eyes, the long light tresses, and the fair face which he again beheld; and Lucy's conquest of him had been as speedy as when she had taken Mr. Hartwell captive, and, I fear I must add, to her far more gratifying.

I will not weary my readers with a detailed account of the progress of this attachment. The Marchese came, and came again, and welcome indeed was his society in their solitude; for Mr. Protheroe continued absent, and Mr. Hartwell was likely to be detained several weeks longer. Lucy had summoned up courage to write to him at last, and tell him of her adventures, but not for two days after the one on which she had originally intended to despatch her letter, and it crossed one of his on the road, in which he expressed uneasiness at not hearing from her, and the hope that, if she were unwell, Mrs. Protheroe would write to him instantly. This letter was most tender and affectionate; more so, Lucy thought, than the one she received in answer to hers, wherein he had detected a slight and most unintentional shade of coldness, which made him all the more disposed not to mince matters in expressing his strong disapprobation of young ladies indulging in long solitary rambles, especially in the neighbourhood of a watering-place, and desiring, rather than entreating, her not to repeat the proceeding.

Lucy's high spirit was a little chafed at what she considered the dictatorial tone of his epistle; and this, joined to

a lurking disinclination to speak of their growing acquaintance with the Marchese, again kept her silent beyond the usual time. Mr. Hartwell had abstained from all allusion to her adventure with the two gentlemen, merely because he had not thought it worth mentioning, and not, as Lucy imagined, from any feeling of jealousy. For Mr. Hartwell was not jealous in the common acceptation of the word; the very strength of his confidence in the object of his love prevented him from harbouring a doubt or suspicion of her, until she should actually force upon him the conviction of her deserving it. But he was doomed to learn the hard and bitter lesson, that he had not done wisely in staking his whole happiness, and placing his whole reliance, on a girl scarcely seventeen, thoughtless by nature, and not rendered less so by education; one, too, who had no firmness of principle to keep her in the path of duty, when opposed to that of inclination. Lucy had warm and lively feelings, but little depth or constancy of purpose; and now she yielded, at first an unconscious, and too soon a willing, victim to the strong temptation that beset her.

The Marchese Monti was an accomplished and well-bred man, possessed of more information than many of his young countrymen; and an easy and rapid flow of language enabled him to make the most of his acquirements in conversation. When he lamented in glowing terms the degradation of Italy and her sons, and dwelt upon her high and palmy state in ancient days—when he spoke of the possibility of her regeneration, and of her assuming once more the lofty station she had formerly held among the nations—it was not altogether with an affected enthusiasm; and aided by the flash of his dark eye, and the general fascination of his appearance and manner, his words reached Lucy's heart, and found a ready echo there. She entered with ardent sympathy into the love he expressed for his own beautiful land—the land still sacred to song, and once no less ennobled by heroic deeds of arms—the land on which nature has showered with unsparing hand her most sublime and loveliest gifts, and where the degeneration of ages has failed to efface in the memory of men the recollection of her ancient grandeur, immortalized in the deathless works of her sons.

The Marchese had a first-rate voice, and a scientific knowledge of the art of music; and he was delighted to sing with

Lucy, and give her all the finishing instruction of which she alone stood in need to perfect a very great natural talent. Mr. Hartwell had set little store by Lucy's musical powers, which she valued far more highly than her abilities for drawing ; but, to please him, she had been sedulously cultivating the latter. Now her pencil was thrown aside, while hours were spent daily in the improvement of her voice while the Marchese was not with her, and in singing duets with him when he came.

Mrs. Protheroe could not but be aware how things were going on ; but the Marchese had never yet spoken of, nor even hinted at, love, so she chose to consider herself exonerated from all blame hereafter in encouraging his visits ; and her sense of honour was not strong enough to prevent her cherishing a secret desire of seeing her daughter a marchioness (though only an Italian one), with the additional advantage of being wealthier than she would be as plain Mrs. Hartwell. She regretted the precipitation with which that affair had been conducted ; but her feeling of what was due to Lucy's affianced husband in his absence, was just powerful enough to restrain her from expressing her real wishes. So, as if by mutual consent, Mr. Hartwell's name was not mentioned between them ; and, for nearly a fortnight after receiving the letter of which we have spoken, Lucy neither wrote to him, nor heard from him.

And was she happy ? She began by being very miserable —so miserable that she could derive little or no pleasure from the first-born emotions of love awakened in her own heart, or from the consciousness of its being fully returned ; but gradually joy usurped the place which might well have been devoted to sorrow, could she have foreseen the fate which she was marking out for herself. She appeased her conscience by the reflection that it never could be right to marry a man whom she did not love, now that she had really learnt what love was ; she assured herself that, though Mr. Hartwell would suffer at first from her inconstancy, yet that he would at no distant day bless her for it, and would find another wife, whose coincidence in his views and sentiments would render him a far happier man, than, with her lightness and frivolity, she could ever hope to do. And, when she had thus quieted her self-reproaches, she would resign herself to the full enjoyment of anticipation ; she

revelled in the idea of the life which she fondly believed was in store for her, and which to her youthful eyes looked so bright and unclouded. But, at times, upbraiding thoughts would again intrude themselves; and her knowledge of what her father's horror would be at the notion of her marrying a foreigner, was very distressing to her. Still, she had great faith in the power she possessed over him; and she believed that his authority would never be exerted against her wishes, when once she had convinced him that her happiness was at stake.

One evening, at the end of the above-mentioned period, Mrs. Protheroe was for once really tired and knocked up, and retired early to rest, leaving the Marchese in the drawing-room to finish a duet with Lucy. The opportunity was not to be lost; so, when the song was concluded, he drew a chair close to her music-stool, and, in language at once flowery and impassioned, he told her that his life and soul were bound up in her, and that existence to him was impossible without her. Lucy had believed herself fully prepared for such an avowal, and for the confession of her engagement which she must make to the Marchese before writing to Mr. Hartwell to annul it; but now, when the decisive moment had arrived—when happiness seemed placed before her, so that she had but to stretch forth her hand and grasp it—all her courage failed her, and remembering only, with anguish it is true, but still with a strong remaining sense of honour, that she was the affianced bride of another, her sole answer was a flood of tears. The Marchese conjured her to speak—he addressed her in the silvery tones of his own language, which he had taught her to love so well—he heaped upon her every epithet of endearment and affection—and at length he ventured to take her hand and press it to his lips. This aroused Lucy from her stupor, and, snatching it from him, she said—

“I may not, I dare not listen to you, Monsieur Monti; my faith has been plighted to another for months past.”

Her words fell upon him like the stroke of a thunderbolt, for he was very deeply and truly in love with Lucy. But an instant's reflection brought back to his mind the conviction that, be her former entanglements what they might, her heart was his now; for, though Lucy had flattered herself that she had been extremely guarded and cautious, she had inadvertently betrayed her feelings by many little signs and

tokens, which the eye of love is so swift to detect. So he pressed his suit all the more fervently till all Miss Protheroe's resolution gave way ; and, suffering him again to take her now unresisting hand, she exclaimed passionately—

“ I love you, and you only, and yet I belong to another. Oh ! God help me, for I am very miserable ! ”

He thanked and blessed her for those words, and no longer scrupled to embrace her. Nor did she struggle to release herself from that embrace, and for some time neither spoke, and the deep silence of the summer night was broken only by the gentle plashing of the waves on the beach beneath the window. He drew her to it, and together they gazed upon the sea, its surface scarcely rougher than a lake, with a bright pathway traced upon it by the soft, clear light of a full moon. Her wooer said, that ere long he trusted they should gaze on a sea of yet deeper blue, and a moon of more cloudless splendour, when the recollection of all past sorrows should be but as a troubled dream, that had melted away for ever in the clear sunshine of undying love. Lucy was not proof against such words as these ; she contrasted them with the plain, straightforward expressions of Mr. Hartwell, which seemed cold, and dead, and lifeless, to the glowing and fervent protestations of the Italian. And, when they parted for the night, Lucy was the betrothed of the Marchese Monti.

Unfortunately for her peace of mind, she was still the betrothed of Mr. Hartwell also ; and, after a restless and anxious night, the next morning brought with it another source of disquietude in the shape of a hasty note from the latter, expressive of the greatest alarm at her protracted silence, and declaring his intention of accompanying Mr. Protheroe to Hastings, where he hoped to find himself a few hours after the arrival of these hurried lines.

This was too much. Lucy could not face them both with her tale of inconstancy and faithlessness. Mrs. Protheroe did not intend to leave her room that morning ; so Lucy awaited alone the coming of the Marchese, which she knew would not be long delayed. He came even before she expected him ; and, with a calmness that was almost unnatural in one of her age and disposition, she put Mr. Hartwell's letter into his hands, at the same time assuring him that she knew her father well enough to be certain that nothing would

ever induce him to consent to her desertion of Mr. Hartwell, and her marriage with a foreigner. The Marchese became paler than was his wont, and ground his teeth in rage, at the idea of the bankrupt merchant not considering him fit for his daughter ; but, suppressing the outward signs of the passion that was kindled within him, and which to a discerning eye would have augured ill for Lucy's future happiness, he said that, under these circumstances, there was but one alternative—that of immediate flight or eternal separation. He urged her, with all the eloquence of which he was master, to choose the former, assuring her in the most solemn and vehement manner that she should never have reason to repent her confidence in him. There was no time for delay, and but very little for deliberation, had Lucy been in a state to admit of it ; as it was, all the powers of her mind were swallowed up in these two terrible ideas—the dread of parting with the Italian on the one hand, and of meeting her father, and the man to whom she had plighted her faith, on the other. So she said—

“ I will go with you, Fabio—I will be yours for ever.”

And without another syllable, almost without hearing the words of love and gratitude which he was pouring into her ear, she left the room to make her hasty preparations for her flight. The first thing she did was to write a few lines to Mr. Hartwell, which she left on the table in his room. She told him that she had nothing to plead in her own extenuation, and could but implore his forgiveness for her unintentional deception of herself and him, in having been so blind as to the real state of her heart. She concluded by assuring him that her own happiness must be incomplete if she had been the means of destroying his ; but that she trusted he would learn to forget one so unworthy of him, and that ere long she should hear of him as blest in the affection of a wife who deserved him.

And, in half an hour, she had left her home, and was walking rapidly along with the Marchese. Her quitting the house in company with him excited no suspicion, and only elicited a passing jest from the servants ; even the little bundle he carried under his arm escaped all observation.

A few hours later Mr. Protheroe and Mr. Hartwell arrived. The latter darted up-stairs into the drawing-room, where he found only Mrs. Protheroe, who, still unconscious of her

daughter's elopement, was in a state of great agitation, and very angry with Lucy for her folly in choosing that day of all others to commence taking solitary walks with the Italian. So, in answer to Mr. Hartwell's hurried and breathless exclamation—"Where is she—where is Lucy?" she answered, with ill-assumed composure—"She is gone for a stroll, I believe: I am sure she had no notion *you* were coming to-day, Mr. Hartwell, or she would have stayed at home."

"Has she not received my letter this morning? Why has she never written to me? You must know something of all this, Mrs. Protheroe," he continued, sternly. Then, suddenly changing his tone to one of entreaty, as he marked her rising agitation, he added—"Is she ill? tell me the worst at once, Mrs. Protheroe."

By this time Mr. Protheroe was in the room; and his first question, even before greeting his wife, was—"Where is Lucy?"

"She is out walking," reiterated Mrs. Protheroe in a low voice; and immediately resorted to a pretended fit of faintness, in order to excite their compassion, and ward off more searching inquiries for the present. However, when Mr. Protheroe had furnished her with a smelling-bottle, and supported her head for about five minutes, while Mr. Hartwell walked rapidly up and down the room, muttering to himself, she revived, and confessed that Lucy had been out some time, and she was beginning to be a little uneasy about her.

"She is not alone, I hope?" said Mr. Hartwell. "Kitty opened the door to us, or I should have supposed that her young mistress would not have been allowed to go without her."

"I was unwell this morning," answered Mrs. Protheroe; "and the dear thing did not like to disturb me, and sauntered out without waking me. Neither Kitty nor I have the least idea which way she went."

"But was she alone?" repeated Mr. Hartwell, in a voice that admitted of no evasion of his question.

"Kitty saw her go out, I believe," returned Mrs. Protheroe, now really frightened; "you had better ask her."

Mr. Protheroe rang the bell; but Kitty, who had informed herself of the true state of affairs by reading the note Lucy had left in Mr. Hartwell's room, thought it her safest

course to protest entire ignorance of every thing, which she accordingly did, to the no small relief of her mistress, but at the same time, greatly to her surprise, as it was from Kitty that Mrs. Protheroe had heard of her daughter going in company with the Marchese. The maid, after gratifying her curiosity by a perusal of Miss Protheroe's note, had found it utterly impossible to re-seal it so as to avoid detection, and had therefore burnt it. She was a young woman whom Mrs. Protheroe had insisted upon having in the place of the honest and useful, but homely, servant engaged by Mr. Barton, and whom she had dismissed a twelvemonth before.

The hours passed on; daylight faded into twilight, and night came; and no Lucy had returned. Mr. Hartwell was scouring the country in all directions, but without success. At length Mrs. Protheroe could no longer bear the burden of her secret, and confessed to her husband that she had for nearly a fortnight permitted the visits of a young and wealthy Italian nobleman, and that Lucy had left the house that morning with him. Beyond that, she declared, and truly, that she knew nothing. Mr. Protheroe was furious; and, for a time, anger occupied the place of grief in his heart; and in his wrath he cursed his wife, and the day that had bound him to such a woman. He vowed, with an imprecation on her head, he would never forgive Lucy, nor see her again; he gave utterance to the most fearful maledictions on her seducer, as he termed the Marchese; and, in the midst of this transport of indignation, Mr. Hartwell came in from his unsuccessful search for his beloved one.

The effect of the intelligence on him was totally different. He spoke not; but from that night he was an altered man. He went forth from that house blighted, and desolate, and soured. Lucy had forsaken and betrayed him: she was gone—gone for ever; and, as he believed, without a farewell line, or a thought or care for him, who had thought and cared for little in this world but her.

CHAPTER XIV.

Two years have elapsed since that night. Lucy is seated by an open window, in a handsome villa at a small watering-place, some miles from Lucca. She is gazing on the deep blue sea, on the glorious and unclouded moon—but where is he who pictured to her these delights, to be enjoyed by his side?

He is not far away; for, if you enter the public room nightly devoted during the season to the pleasures of the dance, you will find him there. One half hour you will perhaps see him laughing and talking with some young English lady, for he is no less a favourite with the fair sex than he was in the days of Lucy Protheroe; the next you may observe him at the card-tables, to a casual looker-on absorbed in the issue of the game. But both the gaiety and the interest are assumed—if you regard him more closely, you will discern a cloud on his brow, a joyless expression in his eye, that betrays a smothered sorrow, rankling deeply in the heart.

So is he amid the gay throng—how is she in her chamber's solitude?

Beautiful still; but the bright and girlish loveliness of two years since has already been exchanged for the sober, saddened aspect of maturer age. But she is only nineteen, so it cannot be the hand of time that has thus smitten her.

“Our life is not measured by years,
There are moments that act as a plough;
And there is not a furrow appears
But is deep in my soul as my brow.”

These lines occurred to her as she sat in the listless attitude of grief, with her head idly resting upon her hand,

and her eye fixed on objects which conveyed no impression to her mind. Two years before—ay, even one—how happy she would have felt on such a glorious night; for then she would not have been, as now she was, alone—alone in the solitude of her own apartment, and in the far deeper solitude of the heart.

Oh! it is hard when the one we have loved so fondly, and who had seemed to love us with a like exclusive ardour, has turned away from us, first in wrath, and afterwards in studied coldness; with a fixed determination to be one with us no more; to have different thoughts, different feelings, different wishes; and to show, by all those little silent tokens, which speak so strongly to our wounded spirit, an utter indifference to all and every one that is dear or sacred in our eyes. This is hard to bear, whether we have deserved it or not; and Lucy had *not* deserved it, if we look only at the tenor of her married life. But, as she sat and pondered over her fate, she remembered her conduct towards one who had possessed every claim upon her save that conferred by the actual marriage tie; she remembered her father, whose passage to the grave, if it had not been hastened, had been darkened by her; and with bitter self-upbraidings she sank upon her knees, and confessed that no earthly sufferings with which it might please God to visit her, could expiate the sins and follies of her early youth.

She rose hastily, as she became suddenly aware that she was no longer alone. The knowledge of this fact was conveyed to her—not by any sound of approaching footsteps, or of an opening door, but by the sight of a pair of greenish, cat-like eyes, gleaming upon her at the distance of about a couple of yards. The room was illumined by the bright moonlight, which rendered every object as visible as at mid-day, but cast over all a dim and hazy hue, thus enhancing the spectral appearance of the tall slender form, clothed in white, who stood before Lucy. In the shattered state of her spirits she could scarcely repress a faint shriek; but she knew too well who it was that had thus disturbed her solitude, to entertain even a momentary thought of a ghost or visionary being. She started from her kneeling position, and resumed her seat without uttering a word.

"*Cara mia Lucia,*" said the person who had just entered, addressing her in Italian, and in tones of habitual but

artificial smoothness ; “ indeed you are very, *very* wrong. It is actually two o'clock—why will you not retire to rest ? You know how uneasy Fabio will be when he comes home and hears that you have been sitting up all these hours. It will only serve to increase suspicions, which I grieve to say”——

“ Silence, Francesca ! ” interrupted Lucy, in a manner which admitted of no resistance. “ I have told you that I will no longer bear these insinuations. I do not believe that my husband, however he may misjudge me in some things, could bring himself to harbour a thought—but what am I talking about ? ” she continued, rising from her chair ; “ my brain is giving way, I think,” and she pressed her hands to her hot, burning forehead. Then, making a hasty effort to collect herself, she added—“ I am going to bed now, Francesca ; good-night.”

“ Have you forgiven me,” asked the Italian girl, “ for my involuntary offence ? Dearest Lucia, I can know no rest till I have received your pardon.”

Lucy cast upon her a glance of speechless contempt, not un-mixed with disgust—the look of loathing which some people might cast upon a toad ; but she merely replied—“ Oh yes ! I forgive you. Good-night ! ”

And Francesca glided forth as noiselessly as she had entered ; but she had no thought of seeking the rest of which she had assured Lucy that her unappeased anger must have deprived her. She went into the drawing-room ; and, taking up a book, she awaited her brother's return. For she was the only sister of the Marchese Monti ; and, next to Lucy, the being he loved best on earth ; and the only one, as he now believed, in whom he could repose entire confidence. She had regular features, and a clear though dark complexion ; but she could not have been called handsome, with those greenish-grey, cunning eyes, whose glance was always averted when it encountered that of another, and watched so stealthily when unperceived by the object of its scrutiny. She had not long to wait to-night ; for the Marchese's step was soon heard, and, a minute afterwards, he was in the room. Francesca had taken care to assume a melancholy expression, and a tone of forced cheerfulness, as she greeted him.

“ My dear brother ! is it you ? I did not expect you would be home so early.”

"It is considerably past two, Francesca," returned Fabio. "Where is Lucia? she has gone to bed, I hope."

His sister swallowed down half a sigh, as she answered—

"I fear not, Fabio. I was with her ten minutes ago."

"How unkind of her! when I have so urged her to take care of herself, and when she knows how anxious I am about her just now!" (Lucy was within six weeks of her confinement.) "What has kept her up so late, Francesca? And why did not you persuade her to retire to rest? For six nights she has been going on thus—there must be some cause for it!"

"When I went into her room," continued Francesca, "I found her kneeling by the open window, with her head buried in her hands. She seemed annoyed at my entrance, and more so, when I begged her for your sake to go to rest; and she said something about your misjudging her, but it was said in haste, I believe."

"Ha!" rejoined the Marchese, with a flashing eye; "she betrays herself occasionally! Thank God, she is as yet no accomplished hypocrite, though I know that in her heart she is pining after that accursed Englishman. *Felice notte, cara mia sorella. Dio ti guarda!*"

Fabio was not going to bed—he was going out again; but, before he went, he ascended the stairs to the door of his wife's chamber. It had been left partially unclosed by Mademoiselle Monti, and he heard at once the sound of footsteps still pacing up and down. This decided him; he turned away in anger; and Lucy never knew that he had been near her all through that night, and she asked herself if the expression of care and anxiety for her, in which he still indulged so often, could be very genuine and sincere.

"It is only on account of the child," she murmured, in the bitterness of her heart, that he cares for my well-being; he wishes for an heir!"

A few minutes after her husband had retired, Lucy, who had been too restless to sleep before, sank into the deep slumber of exhaustion. And then those grey eyes looked upon her as she lay, and her youth and beauty did her no service with them.

"The bait is taking," murmured the young Italian, who had watched her brother from his wife's door; "sleep on, proud beauty! and dream that your son, and not my father's daughter, shall inherit the lands of your husband!"

And, giving her one unrepressed scowl of bitter and deadly hatred—one long gaze from that evil eye, as though she would have blasted her by the power of its fell malignity—she too retired to her rest.

It may seem unnatural that the Marchese should have imbibed so strong a feeling of jealousy against Mr. Hartwell, after Lucy had so fully and candidly told him all connected with her engagement to her former lover. But when Fabio and his wife had been married about ten months, she received a letter from her mother, telling her that her father was on his death-bed, and that his last remaining desire was to see her once again. The young couple were passing the winter in Florence, and participating in all the gaieties of the season, which to Lucy had been quite a new life, after the secluded one she had hitherto led; and Fabio was no less gratified by the admiration her beauty excited wherever she appeared, than she was amused and pleased by the brilliant novelty around her. She had loved the Marchese too fondly and sincerely to bestow one thought upon his fortune; but Mrs. Protheroe had not overrated the extent of it when she had guessed it to be about three thousand a-year, and this in Italy was of course equivalent to a much larger income in England.

Lucy's anxiety to see her father, and receive his forgiveness and blessing, was warmly responded to by her husband; and, with all the rapidity which the winter season would allow of, was the journey to England performed. They were accompanied by Mademoiselle Monti, who had just left the convent where she had completed her education, and had joined them only the day before the arrival of Mrs. Protheroe's letter. Her brother was unwilling to leave her alone in Florence, where she had but few friends; and he also hoped that her presence would be a comfort to his wife in the affliction which he felt certain was in store for her. Lucy's life since her marriage had been so bright and unclouded an one—the fire of youth was still so unquenched within her—that her naturally buoyant disposition impelled her to hope against hope, and would not allow her to believe that her father was really about to die. She pictured him to herself as reconciled to her, and rejoicing in the sight of her happiness; and when they drove to the well-known garden-gate, and all surrounding objects were so unchanged, she was

firmly persuaded that she should find Mr. Protheroe already far advanced towards recovery.

Her husband handed her from the carriage, and resumed his own seat; as he had previously arranged that he and his sister would not go in unexpectedly, but would wait until their arrival should have been made known to Mrs. Protheroe. Lucy scarcely paused to ask a question of the maid-servant who opened the house door, but darted up the stairs to her father's and mother's room. Her hand was on the lock, when she heard sounds that arrested her further progress.

She heard the moans of a strong man in his agony—in the last convulsive struggles with the o'ermastering power of death; she heard the low, querulous tones of a weak woman's wailing; but through these, and above all other sounds, she distinguished a stifled groan, not of the body's, but of the mind's pain, and in an instant her heart told her *who* it was that was standing by the bed-side of her expiring parent, and administering as a son to all his wants. Could she go in—could they thus meet? And she heard a feeble voice which gasped forth at intervals the words—

"Where is she? where is Lucy? Ah! I shall see her no more, but she has killed her poor old father! Hartwell, she has half-killed you—I know it; but you will forgive her on your death-bed, and you will tell her I have forgiven her."

Then a pause.

"Hartwell, if she ever wants a friend, as I know she must some day, will you be a friend to her? There is no one else who will, if you stand back in her hour of need."

Mr. Hartwell could not speak; he could only press Mr. Protheroe's hand as the silent assurance that he would comply with his dying injunctions.

"I think I should have died happier if I could have seen my child once more," murmured the old man; "but perhaps it is better she should be spared the sight of this—she is still so young! I thought she loved me—I believe she did when she was a child; but the old cannot expect the young to remember them long."

Here he was interrupted by a paroxysm of suffering, during which Lucy felt, though she could not see, that Mr. Hartwell was supporting his head, and bathing his temples, and doing all that human aid could effect to assuage his pain. Mrs. Protheroe, always unequal to any emergency, had sunk into

an easy-chair, and hidden her face in her hands, sobbing without restraint. One moment's interval of ease—her husband called her to him—but when she reached his bed-side he could not speak; and, with difficulty, he laid his hand upon her head, and gave her one look, which, had she been capable of appreciating it, might have told her that not all the selfishness and indifference of years had sufficed altogether to root out of his heart his early affection for her.

The clergyman had left them ten minutes ago, and nothing more remained to be done, but to watch in silent awe and dread the rapid approach of the inevitable end.

The dying agonies were now upon the sufferer; and the groans, and struggles, and tossings, were gradually subsiding into unconsciousness—and still Lucy stood at the door, as one paralysed. Collecting his remaining strength for one last delirious effort, the expiring man raised himself in his bed, and called aloud on his daughter's name, as though some mysterious presentiment had told him that she was near. She rushed in, but it was too late: the damp dews of death were already on his brow; his eye was glazed; and he had sunk back on his pillow in that deep sleep which knows no waking in this world.

The Marchese was beginning to wonder at the protracted absence of his wife, who had promised to return to him immediately after she had announced his arrival to her parents. He therefore went into the house, and softly ascended the stairs; followed unperceived by his sister, who had her own reasons for wishing to be present. The door was open, and he entered, while she watched the scene from without. On the bed at one side of the room, lay a real corpse—on the sofa at the other, lay the semblance of one—and this was the unconscious form of the Marchesa. Mr. Hartwell was kneeling by her, and endeavouring to restore her. On regaining her consciousness, her first words were—

“God in Heaven bless you, Walter!” and, as she spoke, she clasped his hand. He instantly withdrew it as Monsieur Monti approached his wife, and bowed slightly to Mr. Hartwell; and, with an air of authority, assumed his place by her side. Walter quitted the room, after exhorting the maid to pay all possible attention to her mistress, who was in strong hysterics. As he passed out at the door, he scarcely observed that a young lady was standing there; but Mademoiselle

Monti felt that she had not observed him in vain. Well had she noted the agonized expression of his countenance as he bent over the inanimate Lucy; the fervent words and clasp of gratitude with which she had greeted him on awaking to an imperfect sense of what was passing around her; the involuntary shudder with which the unexpected sight of the Marchese had inspired him; and the deadly paleness of his cheek, and the tight compression of his lips, as he hurried past her.

Lucy seemed for a while to have relapsed into a state of insensibility, when suddenly she started up and cried—

"Fabio! you have not sent him away without a word? What must he think of me? Indeed, he has not deserved such treatment."

"Compose yourself, *sorella mia*," murmured the soft stealthy voice of Francesca, who had approached the sofa; "your friend is not yet far away; we can easily summon him again to your side."

Lucy shrank from the sound of that voice, which made her very flesh creep, though yet she knew nought of its subtle power. Turning to her husband, she continued—

"Fabio, Mr. Hartwell has tended my father's dying hours, when there was none else to nurse him; you have not turned him from the house, have you?"

"I am not in the habit of turning gentlemen out of other people's houses," returned the Marchese, coldly; for he saw, as he thought, the real impression produced on Francesca by Lucy's earnest, hurried words. But, softened by her distress, and by the sight of the yet warm dead lying so near them, he added—"My dear love, I believe Mr. Hartwell (for such I conclude that gentleman's name to be) has left the room to give some necessary orders, and I will take care he shall receive any message you may wish to send him; but it will certainly be desirable that you should not meet again."

"Only for five minutes, dear Fabio," pleaded Lucy, quite forgetful of Mademoiselle Monti's presence, "and with you in the room; but I should be grateful if I might thank him for his kindness to my poor father, and hear his last words, and"—

Here her loss, and the terrible scene which had just occurred, came back in a rushing tide upon her, and overwhelmed her with grief.

"Would another interview with that gentleman agitate her too much, do you think?" said Francesca to her brother, wishing to lead him to attribute her agitation to one cause alone.

"The experiment will not be tried," he answered, decidedly; and the dark scowl that passed over his handsome features, proclaimed that the green-eyed monster was already usurping a place in his heart.

"Lucy, my love, you had better go with Francesca into your mother's room till you are calmer; and I will see that every thing necessary is done, if there is no one else here to attend to it."

Lucy mechanically obeyed; she indulged in one long heart-rending gaze on the lifeless form of her father, and quietly suffered her sister-in-law to lead her into the adjoining apartment.

We need not dwell upon the few days that followed this sad one—how Mrs. Protheroe's tears were quickly dried up in the absorbing occupation of sending to town for her handsome mourning, and renewed only for the sake of effect before others—how Lucy mourned for the dead with real, though unavailing sorrow—and how Francesca took every opportunity of instilling into her brother's mind the suspicion, that her grief arose almost entirely from his refusal to grant her another meeting with her former lover. Mademoiselle Monti soon ascertained from Mrs. Protheroe's loquacious maid, that this Mr. Hartwell had been an accepted suitor of her young mistress, who, it was believed, had been very much in love with him; and she added some little traits, illustrative of the strength of Miss Protheroe's supposed attachment, which traits were enlarged upon by Kitty, and still further amplified by the young lady, when she poured them into her brother's indignant ear. At first, he angrily refused to listen; but gradually the strong ascendant she possessed over him began to tell, and he no longer turned away from what he firmly believed to be the voice of disinterested affection. Mademoiselle Monti owed her immense influence over the Marchese, not only to his affection for her, but to the superior strength and decision of her own mind to his. She had not his accomplishments or literary knowledge; but from their childhood he had been accustomed to consult her, and to place great reliance upon her judgment; and now he was

unwittingly led by her in almost every opinion and action of his life, which interested her sufficiently to make her endeavour to direct or control him. Had she been with him in England at the time of his engagement, she would have done her utmost to prevent his marriage ; for the aim and object of her existence was to rule her brother and his possessions while he lived, and to succeed to them when he died, which she was entitled to do by her father's will, should Fabio leave no heir. She might have had many more formidable rivals than Lucy, whose health was not strong, and whose character was not likely to gain any ascendant over her husband, beyond the deep affection with which she had inspired him. Once loosen this knot, and the tie which bound them to each other would be severed for ever. So, at least, Francesca fondly hoped and believed.

One little circumstance which occurred during the fortnight they remained with Mrs. Protheroe, greatly aided her views with respect to her unfortunate sister-in-law, by raising in Fabio's mind stronger suspicions than he had yet entertained, that his wife had not been candid with him on the subject of her feelings towards Mr. Hartwell, and that she still retained a lingering predilection for him. Lucy chanced to be examining some drawers in the little room which had formerly been her's, in the hope of discovering a piece of her father's hair, of which, in her distress at the time of his death, she had forgotten to secure any till it was too late. Her search had hitherto been unsuccessful, when suddenly her eye fell upon a small case, in which she had been accustomed to keep Mr. Hartwell's letters, and which she had left behind her when they went to Hastings. She was about to burn them without even glancing at the directions, when she called to mind that she had once enclosed a lock of Mr. and Mrs. Protheroe's hair in a letter to Mr. Hartwell, with a request that he would have them put into a ring for her ; but in his answer he had returned the hair, saying, that circumstances prevented his going to London just then, and he thought it would be safer in her keeping than in his. So she seized eagerly upon the letters, and, after opening several, she came at last to the object of her search ; and securing the prize, by placing it in the folds of her dress, she was advancing towards the fireplace, with the intention of igniting the papers, when she beheld the

Marchese. He was standing near the open door, and had been a spectator of this little scene, which in reality had occupied but two or three minutes. Innocent as her thoughts and actions were, she started, and coloured involuntarily at being surprised by her husband with all these effusions of love in her hand. The aspect of his countenance did not tend to reassure her, for it was very black, as he addressed her harshly—

“Whose letters are those, Lucia?”

“They are some I received before my marriage, which I was going to burn,” answered she, trembling visibly.

“Ah! I thought as much,” he rejoined: “I should like to make sure that they *are* burnt, if you please;” and he took the packet from her hand, and set fire to it.

It would have been far better for Lucy to have told him why she had been examining these letters, and to have shown him her parent's hair; but she was frightened and distressed, and glad to get rid of the painful subject; and thus her husband remained under the impression that it was Mr. Hartwell's hair which she was so studiously concealing and cherishing. His strong natural disposition to jealousy, which his sister was doing her utmost to foster, completed the delusion; and from that hour Lucy's happiness might be said to have departed from her. She felt that it was ebbing from her day by day, but with a very vague and indistinct notion of the cause. She knew that she hated Francesca, as much as she could hate any one; but, even on the night when she had entered her apartment unbidden, Lucy had no adequate conception of the power, or the dark designs of her treacherous foe. The incident of the hair had quite passed from her mind; indeed, she had not at the time observed that her husband's annoyance had arisen from any other cause than the sight of his rival's letters—if rival he could be called; and an idea of the suspicion which Fabio had ever since entertained never once crossed her. But one day, some months after their return to Italy, Francesca had been dabbling in Lucy's work-box while the latter was out with Fabio, and her curiosity had been excited by a little packet wrapped in silver paper, which she had never observed before. On opening it, she discovered the fatal lock of Mr. Protheroe's hair, which was doomed to work so much woe to his daughter; and, though Francesca had no idea on

whose head the treasured piece had grown, it immediately flashed across her wily mind that it might be made very serviceable in the accomplishment of her ends. She put it back into the work-box, but nearly at the top, taking care that a few hairs should straggle forth, and be visible to whomsoever should next raise the lid. The Marchese and his wife came in soon afterwards; and, as Mademoiselle Monti had foreseen, Lucy went to take off her bonnet and shawl, while Fabio sat down to cool himself in the shady apartment.

"Fabio," said his sister, "do you think Lucia would mind my taking her pointed scissors to finish what I am doing here?"

"Certainly not," he answered; "where are they?"

"I believe she keeps them in that beautiful box you gave her the other day," replied Francesca, pointing to where it stood upon its own elegant little work-table.

The Marchese opened the box; and, in finding the scissors, his eye fell upon the packet, and on the light brown hairs escaping from it. He handed the scissors to the young lady, but saw not her malignant glance of exultation as he proceeded to examine the object which had re-awakened suspicions, partly deadened by time, and by Lucy's affectionate behaviour towards himself. The lock was carefully enveloped in wrappings of silver paper; apparently these had often been unfolded to gaze on the contents, and they were still wet from the recent tears that had fallen upon them. The colour of the hair corresponded with the Marchese's recollection of Mr. Hartwell's; for his, as well as Mr. Protheroe's, was of that light brown, the different shades of which would only be discriminated by an accustomed eye. This, joined to her entire silence on the subject, and her total avoidance of Mr. Hartwell's name since that terrible day, all combined to overwhelm the unhappy husband with the stunning conviction that the wife whom he had so adored, was not only in her heart devoted to another, but was practising upon him a systematic course of deception. For was she not treasuring up, in the very gift which he had bestowed upon her, and which had apparently so much delighted her, the hair of one to whom she had been engaged, and whom, by her own confession, she had once tried to persuade herself that she loved? Had she not been weep-

ing, only that morning, over this memento of her absent lover? and then asked her husband to walk out with her, and spoken to him in terms of affection and endearment, which it had rejoiced him to listen to?

He was completely unmanned; and, casting himself into a chair, he struggled not to subdue the rising tears. Francesca approached him, and, twining her arms about his neck, she murmured forth—

"Fratello mio! Ah, speak to me! what is it? I cannot bear to see you thus! Fabio, tell your sister what heavy burden it is that thus oppresses you?"

Ere he could reply, Lucy entered; and, springing forwards, she was about to throw her soft arms around him; but he rose suddenly, cast upon her one look which haunted her for many a day afterwards, and darted from the room.

"What have you been doing to Fabio, Francesca?" asked the Marchesa with something of anger in her voice; "he was so merry when we came in, not ten minutes ago, and now I find him actually weeping!" and, without waiting for an answer, she flew up-stairs to seek Monsieur Monti. But his door was bolted, and he resolutely refused to admit her.

This occurrence greatly increased the cold estrangement between the husband and wife, who had once loved each other so dearly. And, indeed, they had not ceased to love, though their intercourse was thenceforth restricted to daily meetings, always with a third person present; while his demeanour towards her was that of distant, though studied, politeness, and her's towards him of silent trembling dread. His pride and her timidity formed an effectual bar against their coming to an explanation, or even speaking on the subject which was weighing so heavily upon their hearts, and trampling their happiness in the dust. On the night alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, the Marchese had sought the door of Lucy's chamber with a vague, feeble hope, that the mists which had so thickly enveloped their path might yet be swept away—that they might yet be reconciled to each other; but, as we have seen, he had turned from her in unuttered anger. Two days after, they went to Florence, where Lucy's confinement was to take place. Those who saw her then, were all struck with the terrible change wrought in her by the sufferings of the last year; they knew not the cause, but the result was too plainly

visible. Francesca, as their evil shadow, accompanied the pair wherever they went ; for though, with tears in her eyes, she would sometimes say to her brother that she feared her presence was disagreeable to the Marchesa, to whom she was so attached, and that perhaps she had better leave them for a time, and hope for brighter days—yet nothing was further from her intentions than to absent herself from her victims at the present moment. Fabio would not hear of parting with her ; and, had his wife condescended to express a wish to that effect, it would now have been peremptorily silenced, or totally disregarded. Lucy was very miserable, and she had none to whom she could turn for comfort or advice. She thought of her Bible ; but she remembered how easy it had been to persuade her publicly to abjure the faith of her fathers, and embrace that of the Roman Catholics, for the sake of marrying the Marchese Monti. Her conscience did not trouble her on this point as much as might have been expected ; for she had seen little in her Protestant clergyman, or her Protestant parents, to make her believe that their creed must be infallible ; and when she contrasted the gorgeous worship of Santa Croce, and the apparent devotion of the worshippers, with the cold, lifeless manner in which she had seen the service performed at her parish church at home, and the listless apathy of many of the congregation, it had required little eloquence on the part of the Marchese to convince her, that to the pastors of his faith were intrusted the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. But time brought reflection—reflection, which for many months she had drowned in the whirlpool of amusement and pleasure ; but when the hour of distress and anguish came upon her, there came some self-questionings as to her conversion, or rather her adoption of a different religion from that in which she had been brought up, and which Mr. Hartwell had so earnestly endeavoured to impress more strongly upon her life and actions.

But the days wore away ; and to her how long, how dreary, they seemed ! With no one to speak a word of kindness or affection to her, when the sense of bodily weakness and infirmity was weighing her down ; with no one to whom she could look to soften the bitter loss of her husband's love ; scarcely daring to turn to God, because she knew herself to have erred so deeply in one instance, and had learnt to distrust her own motives in another—no wonder the time

was a weary one to her. At length her hour of trial came, and she gave birth to a son, after three days of such intense suffering that her life was despaired of. During these days, and many succeeding ones, Francesca scarcely left her bedside, and enacted to perfection the part of the loving and devoted sister, thereby rendering herself, if possible, still dearer to her brother, and making the previous coldness of Lucy's behaviour towards her more odious in his eyes. But, notwithstanding the fatal delusion under which he laboured, of his wife's faithlessness of heart, he could not see her thus without feeling how beloved she still was by him; and his heart ached sorely at the prospect of really losing her, though, a few days before, he would have declared that she could not have been more lost to him than she was already.

Slowly, but surely, Lucy regained her strength; and the child, though fragile and drooping, lived on from week to week; and his parents hoped, and his aunt feared, that it might yet revive and do well. The month of May was far advanced when the boy was born, and the heat of the city was daily becoming greater. As soon as the Marchesa was able to travel, they all repaired to the country-house in the mountains, which was sufficiently near to Florence to allow of her being visited occasionally by the medical man. As Lucy recovered, the temporary return of warmth and affection with which her husband had treated her in the hour of peril and suffering, gradually subsided into his former cold indifference; and to this was sometimes added a harshness and severity of manner hitherto unknown to her, and for which she was utterly at a loss to account. Shut up as they were in their mountainous seclusion (for their villa was several miles distant from any other), and seeing little of his wife, Fabio was more than ever thrown upon his sister's society; and, with all the weakness generally found inseparable from obstinacy, he became day by day a more complete tool in her hands. She had now little difficulty in persuading him, that Lucy rarely received a letter from her mother which did not enclose one from Mr. Hartwell; and she felt herself secure in insinuating this poisonous suspicion, because she knew that the pride in which her brother so gloried, would deter him from asking any questions, or hinting at such a subject in the presence of his wife. Francesca was constantly on the alert, too, to prevent the possibility of

tête-à-tête ; so that Lucy was kept more entirely in the dark than ever, and could only wonder in silent grief at her husband's increased sternness, and at the total abandonment of his former custom of invariably asking her—"What news from England?" when the post brought her a letter from Mrs. Protheroe, or some English friend.

Her only solace was in her child, who was rapidly growing into a very fine boy, combining the Saxon beauty of his mother with the Italian grace of his father. He was healthy, but not strong ; and anxiously did she watch him for many months. He had been called Francisco, and his aunt was his godmother, for so had the Marchese willed it ; and, as the baby had been baptized but a few hours after his birth, when Lucy was too ill to be consulted, she had had no voice in the selection of his name. As the child advanced in age and intelligence, his father would often send for him, and keep him with him for hours together, for he was doatingly fond of him, and felt proud of him as the heir to his property. With all Francesca's endeavours to conciliate her little nephew, she never could succeed in gaining his love ; for he seemed to have inherited his mother's shrinking aversion to the deceitful Italian girl, and at the first moment he would escape from her lap, choosing rather to play alone than with her. He understood scarcely a word of English, for the Marchese had peremptorily desired his wife never to address her son in that language ; adding, in an insulting tone, that he had no very pleasing reminiscences or ideas connected with it.

And so two years passed away, during which their time was spent between Florence and the country-house, varied by an annual visit to their villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. But, wherever they went, Lucy was equally alone ; she had lost all taste for society, no less than her husband had lost all wish to take her into it. Still, Mademoiselle Monti had as yet attained only one of her objects, and that perhaps of the least importance to her, though extremely gratifying to her feelings—I mean that of making Lucy's life thoroughly miserable.

One evening, during their sojourn in Florence, as Lucy was sitting in her own room, a note was brought to her. She glanced carelessly at the direction, and saw that the handwriting was unknown to her ; but she opened it with little or no curiosity. She was not feeling quite so wretched as

usual, for Francesca had been compelled to absent herself during the last month, to visit some relations at Lucca, and put her signature to some papers ; an old gentleman having recently died, and unexpectedly left her some money, with the express condition in his will, that Mademoiselle Monti should make the acquaintance of his daughter, and terminate the estrangement which had long existed between the two branches of the Monti family. Insensibly, when released from the baneful presence of Francesca, had the husband and wife drawn closer together ; and from his lips she had heard words of affection as in days gone by, and at his hands experienced acts of kindness, to which she had long been a stranger. But he had left her with a cloud upon his brow only half an hour before ; because, when he had announced to her the return of his sister to Florence that afternoon, she had burst into tears, as though she knew that the hope of happiness which had dawned upon her once more, was now again snatched from her.

She was regretting her imprudence, which yet could not altogether banish from her mind the brighter thoughts and feelings that had re-gladdened her of late, when this note was put into her hands. She opened it, as I have said, carelessly ; but her attention was soon forcibly enchaind as she perused the following lines, written in Italian—

“SIGNORA—If you place the smallest value on your own or your husband’s happiness—disregard not the voice of one who, though a stranger to you, takes a deep interest in the welfare of your family. Join the Marchese Monti at the ball at the Pitti palace to-night. It is not in my power to give you my reasons for advising—I would fain say, imploring—you to take this step ; but I warn you that, by neglecting to do so, you may draw down upon both your heads the most tremendous consequences—consequences of which you little dream, and which I cannot hint at but thus darkly. Once more I repeat—go to the Pitti palace to-night ! ”

Lucy read the mysterious words twice over before she could fully comprehend their purport. When she did, her first impulse was to pay no attention to the note, but to treat it as an idle impertinence, emanating from some one to whom she had unintentionally given offence, and who

hoped to induce her to place herself in a ridiculous position. On second thoughts, however, she remembered, that in the secluded life she led, she was little likely to have foes, save, alas ! them of her own household. And the language, too, was so strong, so emphatic ! she could not believe that it was nothing but an imposture. Her husband had more than once, during the last fortnight, proposed to her to join in some festivity ; but, too happy in the partial restoration of her domestic bliss to care for aught beyond, she had excused herself on the plea of the little Francisco being slightly indisposed. This evening Fabio had not asked her to accompany him, although the child was quite well again ; but perhaps this was only because he had thought she would make some objection to going with her sister-in-law.

At last, after nearly an hour's deliberation and wavering, Lucy resolved to comply with the injunction of her unknown correspondent. Probably she could hardly have explained to herself the reasons that induced her to form this determination ; but she felt that some dark mystery had long been hanging over her, rendering her so unhappy, and keeping her in ignorance of the cause ; and she hoped, and almost persuaded herself to believe, that here was an opportunity of enlightenment, which might lead to an altered state of things. Alas ! she remembered not that—

“ Where ignorance is bliss,
’Tis folly to be wise ! ”

She knew not that the sufferings she had hitherto experienced, bitter as they had been, would seem light in comparison of those that she was now bringing upon herself. Had she kept that note, awaited her husband's return home, and shown it to him, instead of burning it, and acting upon its suggestions, it would in all probability have been the means of restoring their happiness. But her judgment was warped, and her reasoning powers were clouded, by years of neglect and sadness ; and she was no longer capable of justly estimating the rashness of the deed on which she had resolved. She did not think Fabio would be annoyed, even at her unlooked-for appearance, after the wish he had lately expressed for her to go into society ; but she knew that he would still consider her too young and too handsome to

enter that crowded saloon alone, and he and his sister were already gone.

There was a Scotch lady residing at Florence, the young widow of a very old husband, who had bequeathed her a fortune of about two thousand a-year. Mrs. Arden had the reputation of being extremely fashionable and worldly-minded, and perhaps she was; but she was not heartless, and the unfortunate had never been known to appeal to her in vain. An accidental circumstance had made her slightly acquainted with the Marchesa at the commencement of the winter season, and she had shown so true an interest in her, and had quietly done her so many little unobtrusive acts of kindness, that Lucy had sometimes admitted her when she would not have seen any one else; and thus she had learnt to feel on more intimate terms with her than with any other lady in Italy.

The same tact which had at once enabled Mrs. Arden to perceive that Lucy was unhappy, prevented her from asking any questions, or endeavouring to force herself on her confidence; and, in the absence of Mademoiselle Monti, her good looks and pleasant manner had won upon the Marchese, who showed every disposition to encourage the acquaintance between her and his wife. To Mrs. Arden, therefore, Lucy resolved to write, and ask her to call for her in her way to the palazzo, and give her a seat in her carriage, if she had one disengaged. On looking at her watch, she found she had no time to lose; but she knew that Mrs. Arden was always late; so she despatched her note, and sat down to her toilette. While dressing, she received a favourable answer, with an intimation that she was not to hurry, as her friend would wait for her as long as she pleased. However, the Marchesa was ready before the carriage was announced; and, as she glanced at her reflection in the mirror before going, it was with something of the exultant feeling of former days, that she saw how very pretty and graceful she looked in her elegant attire. Something, too, of the bright expression of old times shone this evening upon her fair countenance; and when, after kissing her sleeping child, she joined Mrs. Arden in her carriage, the latter could not repress an exclamation of admiration, saying—“*Ah, ma chère, vous aurez un grand succès ce soir!*”

As they drove along, she told Lucy that the Court ball

was on a scale of great splendour, and would probably be unusually well attended, as it was the birthday of the Grand Duchess. Mrs. Arden talked and laughed gaily till they reached their destination ; and when they were safely deposited in the ante-room, Lucy felt her heart beating with a feeling more akin to pleasure than apprehension, at the prospect of the brilliant scene before her.

CHAPTER XV.

IN truth it was a brilliant scene ! The suite of state apartments, so magnificent in themselves, and actually dazzling with light, and glittering with jewels ; the assemblage of the nobles of almost every European nation ; the enlivening strains of music resounding through the rooms—struck Lucy forcibly, although it was not her first introduction to such a picture, and she recalled the impression it had made upon her when she had beheld it as a complete novice. Mrs. Arden had been joined, on leaving her carriage, by two Englishmen—one her brother, Sir Richard M'Naghten ; the other, a Mr. Smythe. She consigned her friend to the care of her own relation, while she accepted the escort of Mr. Smythe. As Lucy passed through the rooms on the arm of Sir Richard, her appearance excited an universal murmur of pleasure and surprise from the varied throng. Those who had met her in the gay world three seasons before, and had marvelled at her unaccountable retirement from it, now marvelled no less at her sudden return ; those to whom she was a stranger were eagerly inquiring her name, and passing their comments upon her beauty. And, indeed, among the many fair ones around her, the Marchesa Monti shone forth conspicuous, if not actually as the belle, yet in the foremost ranks of loveliness. She wore the splendid jewels belonging to her husband's family, which had been re-set for her at the time of her marriage ; and these contrasted strikingly with the lightness of her dress, which was almost girlish in its simplicity.

" Don't you admire my beautiful friend, Mr. Smythe ? " said Mrs. Arden as they walked along.

" Yes," he returned, " her beauty is beyond a doubt ; but you know I am not very enthusiastic as a *general* admirer

of the fair sex." (He was an aspirant for the widowed hand that leaned upon his arm.) "But who is she? for I have not the slightest idea, though her face and manner prove her to be one of our countrywomen."

"You are right; she is English herself, but the wife of an Italian. She is the Marchesa Monti."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Smythe; "what can have induced her to come here to-night? Why, is not the Marchesa Monti the beautiful Englishwoman whose husband shuts her up because"——

He was interrupted by Lucy turning round to Mrs. Arden, and observing that she had not yet been able to distinguish the Marchese. Just then she felt a soft touch upon her arm, and heard Francesca's voice, in its blindest tones, addressing her——

"*Lucia, carina*, do my eyes deceive me? Is it really you?"

"Even so, Francesca," returned her sister-in-law; "and now, can you tell me where to look for Fabio?"

"I think I can discover him, for I was talking to him a few minutes ago. If you please, I will guide you to where I left him."

Sir Richard offered her his disengaged arm, which she accepted; and they passed out into one of the smaller saloons, where refreshments were to be found. They had no sooner entered it than Lucy caught a glimpse of her husband, and her first impulse was to leave her companions and hasten to him; but, too soon, she saw that which arrested her movements, and seemed to freeze the blood in her veins with horror and astonishment.

On a sofa, in a recess at the end of the chamber, sat Fabio; and by his side was a lady, whose dark flashing eye, and foreign complexion, proclaimed her to have been born and nurtured beneath a southern sky. She was, beyond all question, the handsomest of all whose presence graced the entertainment that night; but there was something in the style of her beauty, and in her whole deportment, which spoke little of that purity—that spotless mind—which is generally the characteristic of our fair countrywomen. She and Fabio were at present the sole occupants of this apartment; and they were so engaged with one another that they did not perceive Lucy, who had stepped on in advance of her companions, and was standing immediately before

them. The Spaniard (for such she was) was reclining in a languishing attitude upon the couch, her full dark eye fixed upon the Marchese, in whose hand her own was clasped, and who was pouring into her unreluctant ear his tale of lawless love, in words as glowing and impassioned as ever he had addressed to his unfortunate wife. And, of these words, some reached *her* ear as she stood before her rival; enough to convince her of the fearful truth. Never, in the coldest moments of their estrangement, had she dreamt that her husband loved another, or that all hope of brighter days was at an end; never, for one instant, had she pictured to herself the unimaginable bitterness of this hour. But the very extremity of her despair gave her strength—her womanly pride and scorn of his baseness came to her aid—she did not faint, nor utter an exclamation; and only her blanched cheeks revealed in the slightest degree the awful struggle within. By this time the quick eye and ear of the lady had detected that they were no longer alone; and, hastily withdrawing her hand from the fervent grasp of Monsieur Monti, she placed her finger on her lips, and looked towards the spot where Lucy stood, as if rooted to the floor. Fabio glanced in the same direction, and a fearful oath escaped him when he caught sight of his wife. Madame de la Fontaine had no idea who the intruder was, and attributed Fabio's displeasure only to their having been surprised at a tender moment, a circumstance which disturbed her but little, as she was not now listening for the first time to a similar avowal. So she said—

"Zitto! Zitto! Fabio; you will be overheard. We had better rejoin the others."

But he had already approached Lucy; and anger is no name for the smothered passion of his whispered accents, as he addressed her thus—

"I have to thank you, Signora, for giving me, in addition to all other tokens of your attachment, this last, this crowning proof! But I swear by all that is sacred, you shall live to repent having turned spy upon your husband."

And, as if resolved upon humiliating her to the utmost, he turned; and, taking her hand, he formally presented his wife to her rival. But he was mistaken in Lucy; once aroused, as her gentle spirit had been that evening, her dignity supported her through all. She bowed with cold and

haughty politeness to the astonished Madame de la Fontaine, who, however, returned the salutation with equal self-possession. The Marchesa then told her husband, with every outward appearance of calmness, that she must trouble him to lead her to her carriage, as she had lost sight of Mrs. Arden and her brother, who, not remarkable for the quickness of his perceptions, and seeing only that his fair charge had found those of whom she was in quest, had returned into the ball-room, while Francesca was still hovering near the doorway.

"Indeed!" rejoined the Marchese; "you came, then, under the escort of Sir Richard M'Naghten! But it is all in character! Madame de la Fontaine, forgive me for leaving you alone for one minute."

And he led his wife back through the crowded rooms, in search of the carriage. When they had disappeared, the Spaniard threw herself back on the sofa, exclaiming—

"*Quel contretemps!* I suppose the poor creature is one of those deluded Englishwomen who love a foreign husband, and expect his exclusive devotion in return. Poor little thing! she is very pretty—à l'Anglaise, tout-à-fait;—from my heart I pity her, but unfortunately I like her *caro sposo* too well to relinquish my claims in her favour! I must not forgive him too easily—that would never do!"

The Marchese did not speak, except to ask Lucy in a sneering tone—"Whether it was Sir Richard M'Naghten's carriage that he was to ask for?"

"I came with Mrs. Arden, in *her* carriage!" Lucy answered in a firm voice; "and in *her's* I will return, if my own is not to be found."

He made no further remark, but desired that his own carriage should be fetched; and in it he placed her, and closed the door upon her.

During this time Mrs. Arden was searching anxiously for her friend, in the hope of sparing her feelings the terrible shock of encountering her husband as the acknowledged admirer of another woman; for, as soon as Lucy had quitted them, Mr. Smythe had finished his speech, and informed her that the Marchese Monti's attentions to the beautiful Spaniard, and the height to which he appeared to have attained in the good graces of one generally so *difficile*, were already the subject of discussion in the Florence coterie.

Her search was, as we have seen, unsuccessful ; but she met the Marchese on his return from escorting his wife to her carriage, and she was about to ask him if he had seen Lucy, when it occurred to her that, if she could manage to carry her off without his knowing that she had been at the ball, it would be far better. But a second thought convinced her that Madame Monti had been observed and commented on by too many, to allow of his remaining in ignorance of her appearance there ; so she spoke to him—

“Good evening, Signor ; I am looking for the Marchesa ; have you seen her ?”

“She is gone home,” he replied with a bow, and hastily passed on.

Mademoiselle Monti had been a delighted spectator of the scene above described ; though she had taken care, as soon as she had accomplished her design by securing the meeting, to make herself invisible, lest her presence should give rise to any suspicion in Fabio’s mind of her having planned it. Notwithstanding the somewhat greater liberty which has of late been accorded in Italy to unmarried girls, she rarely went into society, and when there she felt herself out of her element. On one or two previous occasions, however, when she had accompanied her brother, she had marked his unceasing attentions to Madame de la Fontaine ; and finding, on her return from Lucca, that the husband and wife had profited by her absence to re-establish something very like happiness in their mutual intercourse, which threatened to lead to an unreserved confidence, and to the total overthrow of all her long-cherished schemes, she saw the necessity of taking at once some decisive step.

Lucy would not be killed by any previous amount of sorrow—the boy would not die. Francesca was not idle during that first afternoon in Florence ; and her fiendish delight and exultation, when she heard the unexpected news of the scandal coupled with her brother’s name, I will leave my readers to imagine. She ascertained that the lady would be at the ball that night ; the opportunity was not to be lost ; she disguised her handwriting, and composed the note which realized all her hopes, by inducing Lucy to comply with its injunctions, deceived by the assumed solemnity of the language. But, for once, Mademoiselle Monti had narrowly escaped outwitting herself ; and her wicked devices

were only saved from complete exposure, by her sister-in-law's error of judgment in burning the note, and not showing it to Fabio. For, in her haste, Francesca had written on a sheet of paper, which she had received not two hours before from her brother, and which he must instantly have identified, by a sketch on the back of it of their relation's villa near Lucca—a sketch which he had drawn from memory, and had shown her, that she might tell him whether his recollection of the place was at all a true one. He had seen her deposit it in her desk, which she locked, and put the key in her pocket; declaring that she would keep the drawing till she wrote to her cousin, when she would enclose it, as a proof of how lively a remembrance Fabio entertained of the old days spent there so long ago. And, had Lucy remained at home that evening, and given the note to her husband on his return, even then it might not have been too late; for although the Marchese had, during the early part of the winter, hung about Madame de la Fontaine, it had been on his side little more than a flirtation, which, for the last few weeks of re-dawning happiness at home, he had scarcely cared to follow up; and it was not till that fatal night, when flushed with anger, and excited by wine, that he had given utterance to a word of love. His vanity was flattered by the evident preference of one so beautiful, and so often sought in vain; and believing, when he left his wife that evening, that her heart was irrecoverably lost to him, and that he had been suffering himself to be duped by false hopes, he accompanied his English friend, Mr. Deloraine, to dine at the *table d'hôte* of the hotel at which the latter was staying, and endeavoured to drown his reflections by drinking more deeply than was his wont. He returned home to take his sister to the ball; and she rejoiced to see his excited state, in the hope that it would induce him to show a more marked devotion to the Spanish lady than she had yet heard of his evincing. The result, as we have seen, justified her expectations.

Madame de la Fontaine, though by birth a Spaniard, had been educated at an Italian convent, whence she had been sent at the age of eighteen to Paris, and had there married Monsier le Comte de la Fontaine, old and ugly, but very rich. She had, of course, taken no part in the arrangement of the match, and had only seen the old gentleman once,

before she was told that he had proposed for her, and that she was destined to become his wife. She merely asked the amount of his fortune ; and, whatever might have been her secret disinclination to the union, she made no opposition to it. After dazzling the Parisian world for two seasons by her extreme beauty, and the fascinating influence she exercised over all, Monsieur de la Fontaine had resolved to travel for the sake of his health, which was becoming very infirm. They had reached Florence, where they had now been detained for several months by an obstinate attack of the gout, more severe and lasting than any which he had previously experienced. He had always been very stupid, and, for some years past, extremely deaf ; so he was little likely to hear of the numerous admirers who dangled about his young wife whenever she entered into society. But, "sought by numbers, given to none," had her heart remained, until she met with the Marchese Monti, whose half-devotion at first piqued her vanity, when contrasted with the slavish obsequiousness of the other foreigners by whom she was surrounded. Her Italian education had not imbued her with any strong feeling of the sacredness of the marriage tie ; and it was from fickleness to the Marchese Monti that she would have shrunk as from sin and disgrace ; while the acknowledgment of her utter indifference to her savage old husband would have been to her the most natural thing in the world. However, she loved the Italian with all the passionate enthusiasm of her race ; and, though she was a little staggered at first when she heard of a beautiful English wife, she soon overcame her scruples by reflecting that "the cold in clime are cold in blood"—that the *bella Inglese* would never break her heart about her husband, however exacting she might be in claiming his sole affections—and that, in short, as she never went into public, there was no occasion for her to know any thing about the matter. And, after a show of pride and grandeur, she forgave Fabio, and they parted that evening, she more in love than ever, and he feeling something more nearly akin to that passion than he had yet felt for her.

We must now follow Lucy to Casa Monti. When she reached it, she walked composedly to her room, released herself of her jewels and her gay attire, cast one look on those glittering mockeries of her wretched fate, and, dismissing

her maid, she sat quietly down. It may sound strange to say that she was not suffering acutely ; but so it was. She was as one bereft of all power of feeling, her heart scarcely less cold and dead than the marble statue, which she more closely resembled than the living, breathing, animated form of a few hours ago. She reflected calmly on her position. She knew enough of foreign society to be aware how little Fabio's character would be injured in the world's estimation by this *liaison* ; and she knew, too, that if he should be driven to seek for an excuse, he could never find the shadow of one in her spotless and unblemished reputation—that reputation in which he had once so gloried and rejoiced, when he thanked God that he had married an Englishwoman, in whom he could repose the fullest trust, the most undoubting confidence. But Lucy was like one moving in the dark, for she was still ignorant of the deadly suspicion, which was for ever secretly gnawing at her husband's heart, and hardening it in bitterness against her. And she sat for hours in this state of partial insensibility, till at length her exhausted powers found relief in slumber. Long and heavily she slept in her *fauteuil*, not aroused by the gentle knocks which, from time to time, her maid applied to her door. No one else approached her, till about eleven o'clock, the little Francisco, having just returned from his morning walk, darted into the room, unmindful of his nurse's warnings that his mamma was tired, and must not be disturbed. The child evidently expected to be warmly greeted and caressed ; and though still so young (for he was not yet two years old), he seemed chilled and surprised at his unwonted reception ; for, when he had once succeeded in fairly awaking his mother, she looked round her with a wandering unsettled glance, as if striving to collect her thoughts ; and, as though the effort had been too much for her, she gazed vacantly for a few moments upon her little son, impressed one cold kiss upon his forehead, and, murmuring that she was very weary, she sank back in her chair, and her eyelids re-closed. Francisco's *bonne* had approached her lady, and quickly perceived that there was something very unusual in her appearance and manner ; but, attributing it to extraordinary fatigue, she placed a cushion behind her head, and, taking her little charge by the hand, she quietly insisted on his leaving the room.

This *bonne* was the very person from whom I received the hasty outline of the story which I am now relating to my readers, and with the details of which I afterwards became acquainted from other sources. I have thought the sad story would not be misplaced here, as the chief actors in it were at a later period thrown into frequent collision with myself and other personages whom I have already introduced to the reader. And while we leave Lucy in this state of torpor, I will mention that the little Francisco's attendant was, by birth and education, superior to the station she nominally filled, and more fitted for the post of governess to a young child than for that of nurse. She was in adverse circumstances, and Lucy had felt a sympathetic interest in her, when she was told that her fate had been a sad one ; and during the month that her sister-in-law was away, she had engaged Maria Salvi, more as a companion for the boy than actually as his *bonne*. She was never suffered by the Marchesa to perform the more menial occupations of her situation ; but she always accompanied Francisco in his walks and drives, and was destined by her lady to act as his instructress in the rudiments of education, when he should be of an age to learn.

Although Mademoiselle Salvi had as yet passed scarcely a month with the family, she had already become much attached to the mother and child. The former treated her with the greatest kindness and consideration, taking thought for her feelings in those little things in which they are so often disregarded by our equals, no less than by our superiors. Lucy's own unhappiness—to her credit be it spoken—had not had the effect of souring her, or making her indifferent to that of others. Because her husband set at nought all *her* wishes ; because her feelings and inclinations appeared to be the last subjects that occupied his thoughts ; because he never bestowed a care upon what he knew must be her desires, though they were sometimes unuttered, and left to his affection to discern and act upon ;—she did not, therefore, deem herself exempt from all duty towards him, or towards others whom it might be in her power to serve. It is true, Fabio had not ceased to love her ; but from the first, had she not been blinded by her own affection, she might have seen that his was a selfish, or rather an egotistical love—a love which would not, in the common routine of daily life,

impel him to make the smallest sacrifice of his own wishes to please or gratify his wife—though, at the same time, he would gladly have encountered death for her sake. Lucy had surmised nothing of all this till after their visit to England, when the injurious suspicions he had been led to entertain with respect to her, had more fully developed all his faults.

It would perhaps be unjust to say that he was selfish by nature. His was one of those numerous instances of men who have never known what it is to be contradicted or thwarted in a single wish, from their boyhood upwards ; and who consequently enter upon married life, imbued, however unconsciously, with the idea that they are entitled to trample upon every feeling and desire of their wives which does not absolutely centre in themselves ; while their own feelings, their own desires, are not only to be paramount, but never for one instant to be questioned, or even spoken of. As time went on, Lucy's happiness must have been diminished by her union with such a character, from its own very force and tendency ; for neither generosity nor the most ardent expressions of affection, can compensate for the absence of all sympathy and all consideration. But ten months she had spent in one long blissful dream, in the fond persuasion that her husband was nearly as faultless as any human being could be ; mistaking his obstinacy for decision and manliness, and magnifying his really good qualities into the rarest virtues. His sister knew him better ; and she availed herself of the weak points in his character, and made them subservient to her own ends. His self-will she easily bent by apparently yielding upon all occasions ; for she believed that, if it were true that "weak men never yield when they ought to do it," it was no less true that they generally yield when they ought not. By the assurances of her exclusive devotion, she flattered his egotism ; and strove to arouse the jealousy proceeding from it, not only by insinuating that his wife pined for Mr. Hartwell, but that too large a share of her heart was given to the friends of her childhood and early youth, to allow of her thoughts and affections centering entirely in her husband.

The last month had half undone the mischief, of which the consummation had occupied two years ; and Lucy, with her sanguine spirit, was beginning once more to believe in

the perfections of Fabio, when the scene at the ball awoke her from her blissful, but short-lived, dream. As Maria Salvi had been at Casa Monti only during this comparatively peaceful period, she had but a very vague and inadequate idea of the real state of affairs; though sometimes she had discerned a dark cloud on the Marchese's brow, and the traces of tears on her lady's cheek, which did not accord with her preconceived notions of conjugal felicity, in a case in which the marriage was known to have been one of affection.

Towards evening, Lucy awoke from her stupor; and, when Francisco again went in to see her, she talked, and laughed as gaily, as though the events of the last four-and-twenty hours had been entirely obliterated from her recollection. Half an hour later, Mademoiselle Monti knocked at the door; and, after inquiring if she had recovered from her fatigue, she proceeded to enfold Lucy in a sisterly embrace, and express her joy at their reunion. To her surprise, the Marchesa kissed her affectionately, and smiled upon her as she said—

"I have been dreaming about you, Francesca. I thought we met at a large gay ball, where I was enjoying myself so much with Fabio; and then——But it has all passed away from me now," and she put her hand to her head, and appeared studiously to avoid meeting the eye of her sister-in-law, or of Maria.

"Ha!" said Mademoiselle Monti to herself; "so this is the way she thinks to carry it off. But she shall be disappointed yet. Is this your new *bonne*, Francisco?"

"Si," answered the child, shortly; and, running to his mother, he clambered into her lap, while she gazed on him, still laughing.

"I rejoice to find the Marchesa looking so well, and in such excellent spirits," observed Francesca to Mademoiselle Salvi, whose countenance she had been attentively scrutinizing, and whom she was already resolved to dislike and to get rid of, as she read something in that countenance which told her, that neither bribes nor threats would ever induce Maria to lend herself to her schemes, and be false to the true interests of the Marchesa and her son. However, Mademoiselle Monti thought she would not act in a hurry. She soon left the room, promising to repeat her visit the next day, when she fully expected to find that Lucy had dropped this assumed mirth and oblivion of her woes.

When Francisco was laid on his pillow, and sound asleep, Maria went back to his mother, to ask if she could be of any service in assisting her to dress ; or if she would prefer having her dinner brought to her in her private apartments, without the trouble of making a toilette to go down-stairs ; for both the Marchese and his sister were engaged to dine with some friends. As she approached the door, she heard Lucy's sweet voice warbling that beautiful song—

“They tell me thou art the favour'd guest ;”

and when Maria entered, she was singing the lines—

“I only know that, without thee,
The sun himself is dark for me !”

She was giving to the air and the words the fullest expression of which they were capable ; but she broke off suddenly when she saw Mademoiselle Salvi, and laughed as before, saying—

“Oh, Maria ! is it you ? I was expecting somebody else. But they say stone walls have ears, so I had best be careful. It is very kind of you all to keep me company, and prevent my feeling lonely.”

Maria looked at her in astonishment, which was not diminished when she saw that Lucy held in her hand a beautiful album (the last gift of the Marchese), and that she was carefully tearing out the leaves one by one, and scattering them on the floor. The respect she owed to her lady would not allow her to offer any remark upon this strange proceeding ; she merely said—

“*Il caro bambino dorme*, signora ; you will come in presently to give him his last kiss ?”

“I don't know about coming in to-night, Maria ; I am very busy, and must get on with my work.”

Two hours later, Maria returned once more to Lucy's room, and found her in bed and fast asleep. The next morning she arose about her usual hour ; and, thoroughly rested, she looked remarkably well. Francesca had been struck the day before, and also at the first sight she had had of her at the ball, by the manifest improvement in her state of health, and by the soft glow upon a cheek that had long been so pale.

The English physician, who had been in attendance upon the child, happened to call this morning, to pay a friendly

visit to his little patient, of whom he had taken his professional leave some days ago. When Dr. Martyn had seen Francisco, he asked Maria whether the Marchesa was at home, as he was sure she would be pleased to hear from his own lips so favourable a report of her son, whose indisposition, slight as it had been, had given her a good deal of anxiety. He found her seated in her boudoir, at her work-table, and engaged at her embroidery frame. As she rose to greet him, he was so struck by her improved appearance that he could not resist congratulating her upon looking so well; and added, smiling, that he had little chance of finding another patient at Casa Monti to replace the one who had just escaped from his clutches. He was rather surprised that Lucy made no observation, expressive of the pleasure which so doating a mother must naturally have felt at his excellent report of her boy, who, he told her, was daily advancing in health and strength. Dr. Martyn knew too well that *he* was her all; so, concluding that he had touched upon a painful chord, he changed the subject. Still she spoke not, till, at length, she suddenly interrupted him in the midst of some remarks which he was making upon the unusually protracted severity of the winter, by asking him, if he could tell her what o'clock it was, as her watch had stopped. The astonished doctor gazed at her in silence; but his astonishment was speedily changed to horror and distress when she looked up at him, and, for the first time, met his glance. For then the vacant expression of those clear blue eyes revealed the dreadful truth, that reason had fled from her throne, and that she who sat before him was no longer a rational being. She quickly withdrew her eyes from his, in a hurried, nervous manner, and laughed gaily—merrily—but as only those laugh, from whom it has pleased God in His wisdom to take away His noblest, brightest gift of conscious intelligence.

One lingering hope remained; was the Marchesa Monti a victim to a temporary delirium produced by fever? Doctor Martyn took her hand—her pulse beat with the regular, even pace of health; the only difference, that it was less feeble, and told of greater strength than when he had felt it some months before. And now she spoke again, suddenly and quickly—

“Tell mamma I am quite well, and should like to have a

game of play in the garden with Harriet Curtain," mentioning a little girl who had lived in the same terrace in London with the Protheroes many years ago, and whose very name and existence had probably been forgotten by Lucy. "I feel so merry," she continued; "do you know, Dr. Martyn, I never have lessons to do now; nothing but play, play, play, and such pretty new bonnets and gloves I get from papa!"

So she rambled on; and but for the vacant eye, which so studiously avoided meeting his, and the unmeaning laugh, Dr. Martyn might have fancied he was talking to a little girl of five or six years old. He sat still for a few moments, deliberating on what was best to be done. He had heard some rumour of a scene at the ball between the Marchese Monti and his wife; but he had paid no attention to it, as it was mentioned to him by a member of a family remarkable for their curiosity, and their love of scandal, and who had on former occasions endeavoured to elicit from him some explanation of the state of affairs at Casa Monti, where he was believed to be the confidential friend of both husband and wife. However, this was no time for considering the exact disposition of the Marchese with regard to Lucy; so he rang the bell, and asked Maria to tell him that Doctor Martyn was in the house, and anxious to speak with him on the most pressing business before he left.

Lucy, who heard the message given, said—

"Is it papa you want to see, doctor? Ah! I had such a dreadful dream about him the other night! I thought he was dead, and that I had poisoned him; but this morning he came in before I was up, and kissed me, and now I am so happy again—happy! happy! happy!" she continued; and, rising from her seat, she skipped gaily round the room, and almost as lightly as the very child she fancied herself again, had done in former days.

No sooner had Doctor Martyn left poor Lucy, than Mrs. Arden entered her apartment. She had been told that the Marchesa was engaged with her physician; so she had ensconced herself in a little niche or recess on one of the landing-places, and there waited till she saw him pass downstairs, when she quitted her retreat, and sought her friend. She had purposely refrained from intruding herself upon Lucy's privacy the day before, thinking it best to leave her alone until the first shock of an affliction, in which no human

consolation could avail her, should be past ; but on inquiring after the health of the Marchesa Monti, the servant had told her that his lady was at home and quite well, and requested her to walk in. This Mrs. Arden took for an intimation that Lucy did not wish to be denied to her, and that her presence would not be unwelcome. She felt little or none of the confusion that would have troubled many persons at the prospect of such an interview ; for her tact and knowledge of the world made her perfectly at her ease in the most embarrassing situations, and she knew that her course must be to talk as usual on indifferent subjects, unless Lucy should herself lead the way to a more confidential *tête-à-tête*. But there was an extra degree of warmth in her manner of taking the Marchesa's hand, and embracing her, which would not have been lost upon the desolate wife, had not all her perceptions been overcast, and her memory of recent events obliterated.

I need not dwell on this scene, in which poor Lucy showed herself rational and consistent only in her perseverance in the same delusion—namely, that she was once more a little child, and that her thoughts and feelings must occupy themselves on childish pursuits and amusements. Mrs. Arden tried to recall her to herself by mentioning Francisco, and saying she hoped Lucy would allow her to take him for a drive.

“ Francisco ? ” said the Marchesa, with the puzzled, wondering look which came over her when the persons or events of to-day were spoken of—“ Ah ! you mean the little boy who is staying in this house ; he comes to play with me sometimes. I believe his papa, the Marchese Monti, lives here ; you must ask *him*. But why won't you take *me* ? ” she cried, starting up ; “ I want to have a drive, and I am sure you have known me longest.”

Mrs. Arden was perplexed at this request, for she could not arrogate to herself the responsibility of driving the Marchesa out in her present condition, without the sanction of her husband or the physician ; and, besides, she had left Mr. Smythe and her brother in the carriage, and could not suffer Lucy to accompany them in her unfortunate state. So she said that it was quite out of the case that day, as one of the gentlemen who were with her particularly disliked young children ; but she would see about it another time.

"Then why do you take that little boy?" asked Lucy, in a mortified tone.

Mrs. Arden was struck by the question, which betrayed so much of the lurking sense and power of connecting ideas, which often startles us in our intercourse with deranged persons; and she felt vexed with herself for her own thoughtlessness, when, on approaching to kiss her friend, the Marchesa coldly averted her head, and remarked, sadly—

"I fancied you had loved me better."

"I do love you very much!" said Mrs. Arden, affected almost to tears; "and I am very glad you reminded me about Francisco, I shall not think of taking him to drive with me to-day."

Shocked and grieved, Mrs. Arden left her; and, as she passed out at the door, she met Mademoiselle Monti, with whom she was but very slightly acquainted. However, under the circumstances, and considering her former intimacy with Lucy, she felt herself authorized to say how alarmed and distressed she was at the melancholy condition in which she had so unexpectedly found the Marchesa, and that she was sure Mademoiselle Monti would agree with her in her conviction of the necessity that existed for her receiving the utmost care and attention, and for her wishes being indulged as far as possible. Mrs. Arden added, that she should call again in a few days, trusting that her friendship for Madame Monti would excuse what must otherwise be deemed an intrusion. She did not wait for the long and measured reply which Francesca was preparing to make, but bowed rather stiffly, her salutation being returned by the Italian girl with the utmost courtesy. Had their thoughts been uttered, they would have conveyed a meaning something like the following—

Francesca—"That woman is determined to come here, and see that Lucy is well done by; but I will take good care she does not. Of course, the doctor must say that the Marchesa is to see only her own family. I flatter myself the Italian will prove a match for the Scotchwoman!"

Mrs. Arden—"I don't half like the sly cringing ways of that girl! When she looks at me, I always feel an inward shudder, and think of the *mal-u'occhio*, and wish I had an amulet about me! But I must consult some one, and do all I can for that poor dear young creature. It makes one's heart ache to see her so."

But was not Lucy's visitation sent, perhaps, in mercy to her, and as an awful warning to Fabio? For now she knew no more of grief or sorrow; the heavy load of anguish and despair was removed from her heart, which was again glad and joyous as that of a little child. It may appear almost unnatural that this shock should have had so sudden and overwhelming an effect on her nerves; but it must be remembered that they had been previously weakened by a long continuance of suffering. She had risen morning after morning with that weight upon her spirits, that dull, oppressive sense of misery, which I have before attempted to describe; her days had been passed in loneliness, and in dwelling upon the happy past, which had been so suddenly snatched from her, she knew not how, nor why.

And, meanwhile, the soft climate had agreed with her health, and had strengthened her constitution; and so, when the blow came, it fell not upon the outward frame, but upon the inward spirit.

Doctor Martyn found the Marchese in his morning room, conversing with Mr. Deloraine, with whom Fabio had been walking that spring-day in the neighbourhood of Hastings, when he had first seen her who was now the subject of their conversation.

"You will repent your folly some day," Mr. Deloraine said, "in casting an English wife overboard for the sake of a Spanish mistress! The former may give you a little trouble now and then; but the latter will play the very devil with you, and all you have. Monti, you know, before it was too late, I did my best to dissuade you from the match. I went almost beyond what even our long friendship could justify; for I was firmly persuaded that the intermarriage of those of different nations rarely turns out well, and I thought you did not know enough of your little syren to make the irrevocable step a wise one. But you chose to take it, and now it is your best interest to be kind to her; and, at all events, not to humble her and set her at defiance by taking her into the society of that woman."

"That woman," interrupted the Marchese, "as you are pleased to term her, is the most beautiful creature in this world, and she loves me as devotedly and exclusively as an English wife is *supposed* to love her husband."

"I declare, Fabio," rejoined his friend, "you are turning

green again in your old age! Why, you don't mean to tell me that you place any faith in those treacherous black eyes and smooth words?"

Fabio was about to make a somewhat angry reply when Doctor Martyn came in. He looked at Mr. Deloraine, who took the hint; and bowing to the doctor, and nodding to the Marchese, with an "*au revoir, Fabio*," he walked out. The good physician had been considering how he could break the dreadful intelligence to Lucy's husband in the least shocking manner; but Fabio's short, abrupt way of asking him if there was any thing the matter with the Marchesa, roused his honest spirit, while it relieved him of a great part of his painful embarrassment.

"I grieve to say that there is a great deal the matter with her, Signor," (the Italian frowned, and moved impatiently in his chair.) "Have you ever heard whether any of the Marchesa Monti's family have been known to evince symptoms of insanity?"

"*Che dice?*" groaned, rather than said, the horror-stricken husband; "for the love of God, doctor, tell me what you mean?"

"I mean," returned the physician, "to prepare you for the worst. I have just visited the Marchesa, whose malady, I conclude, must have come on within the last few hours, as I see you are wholly free from any suspicion of it."

"What do you say, doctor? You don't tell me that my wife is—*mad*?"

He could hardly bring himself to pronounce the last dreadful word; and he turned so deadly pale and faint, that he grasped the back of the chair, against which he had been leaning, for support. Doctor Martyn was possessed of a large share of that kindness and benevolence of heart, which we so often find in those whose lot it is to visit the couch of the sick and dying, and by their superior skill and knowledge to administer to the relief of their sufferings; and many there are who will testify, from their own experience, that, next to God's minister, the best and truest friend who has been with them in that trying hour, has been he whose drugs and cordials have not more revived their fainting bodies, than his words and acts of kindness have soothed and cheered their sinking hearts.

Doctor Martyn was of this sort. His first care, now, was

to pour out a glass of the wine which stood on the table, and insist on the Marchese swallowing it; he then took him by the hand, and making him sit down, he said, in those tones of heartfelt sympathy which are never without their consoling influence upon the sufferer, even though his woe be a hopeless one—

“My dear Marchese, from my heart I grieve for you. God has indeed visited you with a heavy trial, but one which no human power can avert, and therefore”——

“But *I* have done it! Doctor Martyn, *I* have driven her mad! God’s curse is upon me, for my sin is deeper than Cain’s! Oh God! have mercy upon her; for there is no mercy left for me—no hope in this world, or the next!”

This outburst was delivered with the frantic violence of a maniac; and for a moment the bewildered doctor thought he must have found two insane patients, instead of one, in the house, for he had not the most distant conception of the Marchese’s meaning. Fabio had risen from his chair, and falling on his knees, he buried his face in his hands, and made not the slightest effort to repress his bursts of agony. Doctor Martyn had lived some years abroad, and had seen enough of the excitable children of the south to know that this passion would spend and exhaust itself, but that it would be in vain to attempt to reason with it. He, therefore, sat quietly, while his heart bled for the miserable man, who, in some way or other, seemed to hold himself accountable for his wife’s insanity.

Doctor Martyn was right. After a few minutes, the Marchese rose, hastily took another glass of wine, and said—

“But, no! the blame lies not altogether at my door! Was it *my* doing that she chose to go to that accursed ball? Besides, though I have sinned against her, in heart she has been—but I beg your pardon, Doctor Martyn,” and Fabio collected himself, and resumed his usual quiet, gentleman-like manner; “I am detaining you, and only harassing your feelings by this useless display of mine. You will, I am sure, do all in your power for my unfortunate wife, who, I well know, could not be in better hands than yours! Can you give me the faintest hope of her recovery? I remember to have heard her say, that Mrs. Protheroe’s mother was insane for some years; but that she entirely recovered her

senses, and retained them to the day of her death. Is there not, therefore, a chance for the Marchesa?"

"I must see her again before I can give any decided opinion," returned Doctor Martyn. "At present I have had but little opportunity of judging. Her best chance (and one which Madame Monti is certain to have) lies in her being gently and tenderly treated, and not thwarted or contradicted in any harmless wish she may express. Unless she changes very much from the state in which I have just left her, she will require little or no restraint; in fact, she should be treated as you would a child of four or five years old. And now, Monsieur Monti, I must wish you good-morning. I need scarcely add any assurance of the deep interest I feel in the Marchesa Monti, or that my most earnest endeavour will be exerted in her cause."

"God bless you, Doctor Martyn," said Fabio, grasping his extended hand; "could you see my sister before you go?"

"Certainly," answered the physician; "I was not aware that Mademoiselle Monti had returned home."

Fabio went to summon Francesca, and sought his wife's apartment. But when he reached the door, he could hardly muster courage sufficient to turn the lock; his hand trembled, his knees shook, and the objects around him seemed to dance before his eyes. At length he commanded himself and went in. Lucy was singing; and, as before, the words and air were English, though it was long since she had sung except in Italian or German.

"I only know we loved in vain,
I only feel—Farewell! Farewell!"

The words smote upon his heart like an accusing knell but the evil spirit whispered, were they meant for him. Apparently they were chosen at random; at all events, the Marchesa did not seem to attach any mournful signification to them, for her face was radiant with smiles. She looked up for a moment at her husband; then, as usual, averted her eyes, and laughed.

"*Ah! è voi, Signor Monti?* There has been a lady here who wanted to take your little boy out driving; but I said she ought to take me instead to-day—don't you think so?"

"My life! my darling!" exclaimed Fabio, kneeling by

her side, and throwing his arms around her ; " I am your own husband ! don't you know me, *carissima* ? "

Lucy looked at him with a bewildered air ; and, gently disengaging herself from his embrace, she said—

" Husband ! ay, in play, I suppose ! But you will soon get tired of playing with me ; I had rather have even Francisco, if Harriet can't come to day."

Fabio had thought himself steeled to endure any thing ; but this was more than he could bear, and he walked to the window to conceal the emotion he could no longer repress. His son came bounding in.

" *Babbo* ! " said the child, clinging to him ; " speak to mamma." He was too young to express his meaning ; but he evidently felt the difference in her manner, though he understood it not in the least. His father took him in his arms, and kissed him tenderly.

" Ah, Francisco ! " cried his mother ; " where have you been so long ? Now come and have a game of play with me. I am so tired of being alone, though I have been very merry. Your *babbo* can leave you with me," looking at Fabio, as if to intimate that he might go. And in a minute he saw her playing at ninepins with the boy ; not as a mother with her child, but as one child with another.

And he turned and quitted the room, just as his sister had wafted her last soft *addio* into the ears of the departing physician, who, like many other persons, had a strong instinctive dislike to her, without knowing any thing against her. Surely these instinctive dislikes do not always deserve to be branded with the name of a silly antipathy or a groundless caprice. Are they not, rather, in some cases the result of that intuitive perception of meanness and treachery with which an upright honest mind is so often gifted ?

When Francesca met her brother, she threw her arms round his neck, and wept aloud. Touched by her ready sympathy with him, whether in joy or sorrow, the infatuated Fabio proceeded to vest in her the entire charge of Madame Monti ; because, he said, his mind would then be at ease in the knowledge that every thing the most anxious care and affection, and the best judgment, could suggest, would be done for her. And the last obstacle in the way of the Italian girl's perfect triumph seemed removed, when the next morning a note was delivered to her from Mrs. Arden,

saying that she and Sir Richard M'Naghten were suddenly recalled to Scotland by the dangerous illness of their mother, their only surviving parent, whom they expected to find on her death-bed, if indeed, by travelling with the utmost expedition, they should be fortunate enough to see her once more. Mrs. Arden concluded by giving Mademoiselle Monti her address in Edinburgh, and expressing her hope that the young lady would, from time to time, write her a few lines concerning her sister, who was the object of so warm and lively an interest to them both.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Francesca, who was alone when she received the note; "this is good news indeed! I shall easily get round that soft old doctor; but women are so quick-sighted, I should have had some trouble with her. *Chi va piano, va sano!* How thankful I am that I have taken that for my motto through these tedious years, instead of being more precipitate, as once or twice I have been sorely tempted to hurry matters on."

Notwithstanding her urgent haste, Mrs. Arden would not have left Florence without making some effort in behalf of her unfortunate friend, had she possessed the least knowledge of the true state of affairs at Casa Monti. But with the Marchese and his sister both by Lucy's side, how could Mrs. Arden presume to interfere—how could she be authorized in so doing? She had never heard a word against Francesca from the lips of Lucy, who had been far too honourable, and too sincerely attached to her husband, to utter a syllable to an indifferent person against any one belonging to him. But it was with a sad foreboding at her heart, that Mrs. Arden dashed by the archway of the Casa Monti that morning, as fast as four horses could bear her along. And Lucy, who was looking out of the window with Francisco, caught sight of the well-known carriage and also of the travelling boxes, and said to her little companion—

"Look, Francisco; there is the lady who was to have driven us out! How sorry I am that she is going away!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ON the evening of the third day after Doctor Martyn's visit, Madame de la Fontaine was sitting at a small table, writing the following note :—

"What is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct? For two days you have neither approached me, nor sent to account in any way for your absence. Did you not leave me on Wednesday morning, faithfully promising to return yesterday—nay, ardently vowing that you should live on the happiness of recollection and of hope until we met again? And this is ten o'clock on Friday night! I know you are not ill, for I heard accidentally that you had been seen standing at Doctor Martyn's door, in company with your English friend. We parted not in coldness, nor in anger, for our last words were those of tenderness.

"Fabio! I will not, because I cannot, brook such scorn from you. Remember, my whole heart is yours—my whole happiness is in your hands! Remember that the love of a Spanish woman, if quenched or slighted, turns not to indifference, but to deadly hate.

"If you have in truth ceased to care for me—if your shallow fickleness has already discovered another object of attraction—tell me so at once. The waters of the Arno flow close at hand—they shall then be my refuge. I can encounter death fearlessly; but, having once experienced the mighty power of love, I cannot endure existence without it. Or, if my rival be the young English wife, whose pale, cold beauty shone upon me *that evening*, beware how she again deceives you! You say she has but half a heart for you, if even that; and, were it otherwise, how *could* she feel like me? But I will not believe it—I know you are not false to me! Oh, my beloved Fabio! hasten to dispel these doubts

and fears—hasten to relieve me from this agonizing suspense, and to assure me that my dream of Paradise is not doomed to so fearful an awakening ! You see how the proud Isabella has humbled herself before you—will you scorn her now ?”

When Fabio received this note, he resolved to pay one last farewell visit to the writer, to whom he felt that he owed some reparation. Madame de la Fontaine was but too sincere in the sentiments she expressed. Had she been an Englishwoman and a Protestant, her language and feelings would not have admitted of the slightest palliation ; but endowed by her Spanish nature with the strongest passions, and untaught in the religion which would have led her to check and repress them, she thought herself but little guilty in the indulgence of her love for Fabio. And thus she had spent the last two days in a state of alternate grief and anger ; and when the Marchese Monti entered her boudoir the following morning, he found her with her head buried in her hands, and both reposing on the table near her—her attitude expressive of the most profound dejection. She started up when she saw him ; and her eyes flashed fire, when, without a word of apology or regret, he told her that he was come to bid her adieu for ever. Having said this, he was silent ; and, as she recalled the two mornings they had passed together after his declaration at the ball, she asked herself how she could possibly have offended him.

“ Was it my note, Fabio ? ” she gasped forth. “ Oh, speak to me ! I have none on earth now, to whom I can look except to you, and you are turning from me ! Why is it ? ”

“ Come with me,” he answered, in a hoarse voice, “ and I will show you why.”

She went with him, and they drove to Casa Monti. During the drive (which lasted little more than five minutes) not a word was spoken on either side. When they alighted, the Marchese offered his arm to Madame de la Fontaine, and together they ascended the staircase to the Marchesa’s apartments.

“ Where are you going to take me ? Surely not to your wife ? ” remonstrated the Spaniard.

Fabio made no reply ; but, as she at first refused to advance further, he entered the chamber, and left Madame de la Fontaine standing in the doorway. Lucy was alone, and

apparently engaged at her embroidery frame. But her work progressed very slowly, for she could not fix her attention on any thing, and she often made mistakes, which she failed to detect at the time, and then she would unpick far more than was necessary. So completely was her mind unstrung, she was scarcely capable of performing the smallest trifle that required any thought; but hitherto she had been as tractable and docile as a little child. Maria and Francisco were her favourite associates; but she no longer shrank from Made-moiselle Monti, or seemed afraid of Fabio.

He spoke to her, and a scene ensued very similar to those we have before described, betokening more a reason departed than a mind diseased. Madame de la Fontaine could hardly credit the evidence of her senses; and, inexpressibly shocked, she leaned against the wall, and gazed in silent dismay upon the wreck before her, in the consummation of which she could not but feel that she had been greatly instrumental. For she did not doubt, for one instant, that the sudden and appalling conviction of her husband's infidelity to her, and devotion to another, had driven Lucy mad; and the strength of her own affection led the Comtesse to estimate that of the wife more justly, and no longer to consider her as cold and callous.

Cold and callous! As these reflections passed through the mind of Madame de la Fontaine, a sigh escaped her—it was a low one; but the quick ear of the Marchesa detected it, and she immediately walked a few paces towards the door, to satisfy her curiosity. A momentary glance sufficed. Lucy recognised her rival; and, transformed in one moment from the gentle, yielding child, into the frantic despairing woman, she sprang at the astonished Madame de la Fontaine, and seized her by the throat. As though possessed with a strength beyond her own, she clung to her foe till the latter became actually black in the face, and gasped for breath. The tigress robbed of her whelps could scarcely be more savage and relentless than was the unhappy Lucy, who, bereft of the controlling power of reason, thirsted only for vengeance. After some ineffectual endeavours, the Marchese succeeded in disengaging the Spaniard from his wife's grasp; and exhausted by exertion, and by actual pain, the Comtesse sank down upon the nearest chair. Then remorse attacked Lucy for having lifted her hand against another; and all her

womanly tenderness returning, she knelt on the floor beside her rival, stroked her face and hair, and rubbed her hands with the utmost gentleness, crying piteously, and imploring forgiveness. Madame de la Fontaine wept, too; and in a few minutes Lucy appeared to have lost all remembrance of what had just occurred, and several times she fondly kissed her with whom she had so lately grappled in the fearful struggle to take away her life.

At length the Spanish lady rose to depart; and Fabio, ringing the bell to summon Mademoiselle Salvi, escorted her back again to the carriage. But first he led her into an adjoining apartment, and expressed his deep sorrow for what had happened.

"Fabio," said she, "*you* could not anticipate that the Marchese Monti would recognize me, and you acted most wisely and most kindly in bringing me here. I have learnt a lesson which I shall never forget to my dying hour. For have not I been the cause of what I have just witnessed? have not I broken her heart, and reduced her to what she is? And will she not haunt me in my dreams—ay, and in my waking hours? and, though absolved I may be by God's minister, can I ever forgive myself? And now farewell, Fabio; farewell for ever! for we must *never* meet again. Even now I cannot speak to you calmly; and never could you be as a friend, far less an indifferent acquaintance, to me! My heavy punishment (and, ah! my own heart only knows *how* heavy it is, even in anticipation) shall be, that I am to see you no more! You had forestalled me in this decision; but, were you on your knees before me, imploring me to revoke it, I should have the strength to tear myself from you. *Addio, per sempre!*"

And so they parted.

Madame de la Fontaine kept her word; and from that day she was an altered woman. During the few remaining years of her husband's life, she devoted herself to soothing his infirmities, bearing with his constant ill-humour and unreasonable wishes, as each day he sank more completely into dotage. And when he was gone, she retired to a convent, where, without binding herself by vows, she fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and nursed the sick, and in the deep penitence of an humbled and contrite heart, sought daily to make her peace with God. And her former gay

associates wondered at, and a few regretted, the disappearance of the beautiful and elegant Madame de la Fontaine from a world which she was so eminently qualified to adorn. She never more saw either Fabio or his wife ; and at her death, which took place not many years afterwards, she bequeathed half of her large fortune to Lucy's son ; dividing the other half between a distant cousin of her husband's (his only remaining relation), and the convent which had sheltered her from the time of the Comte de la Fontaine's decease.

Not even to his sister did Fabio mention the terrible scene of which he had been so undesignedly the cause, as he knew too well why it was that his wife had been so excited, to entertain any apprehension of a recurrence of such violence on her part. In this he judged rightly ; Lucy never again displayed the least symptom that required restraint ; and her general health was so excellent, that Francesca soon took occasion to observe to her brother, that as nothing more was now required than an occasional visit from Doctor Martyn, she thought, under their very distressing circumstances, they should be quieter and happier in the country. The Marchese readily assented, and they were once more domiciled in their mountain home—that home, in which the victim of a credulous jealousy on the one hand, and a designing malice on the other, had passed so many sad and lonely hours. But she had evidently forgotten all this, and her countenance and her words were expressive only of childish glee, as she pointed out to Francisco the abundant promise of oranges and citrons held forth by the luxuriant blossoms.

It had occurred to Mademoiselle Monti, that it would be necessary to ask Mrs. Protheroe to visit her daughter in her present afflicted condition ; and, as she knew that the idea would ere long suggest itself to the mind of the repentant husband, she resolved that she would be the first to propose it. The fortnight she had once passed with her sister-in-law's mother, had given her, naturally so penetrating, a tolerable insight into Mrs. Protheroe's real character ; which, indeed, in its very artifice was contemptibly shallow, and required but small discernment to comprehend. Mademoiselle Monti concluded that Mrs. Protheroe was not the woman voluntarily to quit a comfortable home, and expose herself to the fatigue of travelling, with no more tempting prospect than that of being called upon to minister to sick-

ness, whether bodily or mental. The income left her by her husband was all-sufficient for her wants, if not for her desires, and, since Mr. Protheroe's death, it had been still further augmented by the generosity of her son-in-law ; and by many a present, not actually of money, but of money's worth, from one to whom she had done little to merit such kindness, but who could never forget that she was the mother of her who had once been so inexpressibly dear to him. Mr. Hartwell having purchased of her the cottage bequeathed to her husband by Mr. Barton, Mrs. Protheroe had fixed her residence at Bath ; where, after the first year of her widowhood, she became a constant frequenter of the numerous card-parties and assemblies with which that city abounds.

Mademoiselle Monti judged rightly. She delighted her brother by this fresh proof of her affection and thoughtfulness for his wife, without incurring any real risk of a visit in all ways so obnoxious to her feelings. Mrs. Protheroe wrote a flowery, sentimental letter to the Marchese ; thanking him for his hospitable invitation, and lamenting that her increasing delicacy of health must prevent her from acting upon the impulse of a fond mother's heart, by instantly accepting it. The sight of her beloved Lucy in such a condition, would, she knew, overwhelm her completely, and render her only an additional burden, instead of an assistance, to Monsieur Monti and his sister. She concluded by assuring them that she had the last miserable consolation of knowing how tenderly and untiringly her sweet daughter was watched and nursed ; and with her love to the darling little pet, she should continue, during the short remainder of her days, &c. &c.

Monsieur Monti, who had observed Mrs. Protheroe less carefully than Francesca, was extremely surprised by the contents of this letter, which he said must have been written by the most selfish and heartless of women ; but his sister remarked, that now she felt as if Lucy was more completely her's than ever, and she trusted she should be enabled rightly to discharge so solemn a responsibility.

For the first year, Fabio never passed a night away from home, and condemned himself to the daily penance of spending some hours with Lucy ; the sight of whom was a constant reproach to him, and with whom he was by no means an especial favourite. To do him justice, he no longer sought

to extenuate himself by indulging the belief of her faithlessness towards him—on the contrary, he strove hard to banish the jealous suspicion, which even now at times, as a dark spirit, possessed him. But when he looked upon her, he felt that he could never devote himself too exclusively to his wife, who through him had received a shock so awful as to shatter her mind and deprive her of reason.

And Francesca's energies were no longer employed only or chiefly in supplanting all good feelings in her brother's mind, and replacing them by all evil ones. She saw little chance of any improvement in Lucy; and, while she remained in her present state, she had nothing to dread from her in the way of rivalry, or interference with the one scheme which now wholly engrossed her. It mattered not to her whether Fabio's brow were joyous or clouded—whether his thoughts were peaceful or disturbed; so long as he looked to her alone, and reposed entire confidence in her, it was equally indifferent to her, whether he solaced himself with the hope of a reunion with his wife in a Heaven in which she had no faith, or strove to banish his gloomy apprehensions of a hell which she told herself had no existence but in the idle dreams of enthusiasts. For, in truth, Francesca had almost persuaded herself to disbelieve, what it was so much her own interest to deny, the being of One who has said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." As a girl, she had not been without some dread of her confessor, but she had never looked beyond or above him; and—when once her matured reason had convinced her of the folly, rather than of the wickedness, of believing that the absolution of mortal man can avail the sinner whose repentance is as insincere as was her own—when once her understanding had pointed out to her the many grievous errors now defacing that Church which had been so emphatically the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth—she cared little to inquire whether she was therefore justified in rejecting all religion, but was glad to take refuge in that unbelief which allowed her to follow the evil bent of her own inclinations, and to pursue without remorse her darling plans for securing to herself the inheritance of her ancestors. And so with her, as with many others, the wish to disbelieve the awful and tremendous doctrine of future retribution, went far towards producing the disbelief itself; and her own unprincipled and selfish

conduct gradually blinded her to the intrinsic beauty of goodness and virtue, which few of us can fail to recognize and adore at some period of our lives, however little our actions may be in accordance with that which claims our involuntary homage. With all her art, she had never succeeded in gaining the love of any one except her brother, on whom she had imposed so successfully as to make him consider her a model of disinterested sisterly affection. But even this produced no corresponding feeling on her part. It is true, she did not actually hate him as she hated Lucy and her child ; but she despised him for the very weakness that blinded him to her real character, and she looked upon him as one of the obstacles in the way of her heart's desire.

Fabio and she had been left orphans when she was hardly more than an infant, and he had felt for her what it is so natural for a brother to feel for an only sister in such circumstances. She was his only near relation—the only being to whom he had a right to look for that real affection which is so necessary to our happiness. And when, to his brotherly love was added his growing respect for her unfolding judgment and clear perceptions, her influence over him became very great, and ended, as we have seen, by leading him to indulge his evil passions and propensities, and bring misery on his own head, and on that of his wife. Mademoiselle Monti had too much worldly wisdom to shock what she considered his religious prejudices, by any revelation of her own infidel opinions. From him and from all others she sedulously concealed them ; while she fostered and strengthened them in her own mind, that she might never in future years be stung by remorse for the crimes of her youth.

Her nephew was now the stumbling-block. She had succeeded in getting rid of Maria Salvi ; but not without difficulty, for the child had clung to her with tears and shrieks at the prospect of her leaving him ; and his father, who had happened to enter the nursery at the time, had interceded with his sister to forgive her—what, he knew not, and never asked. Francesca ground her teeth in silent fury, but appeared to relent. She knew not of what to accuse Maria, who was devoted to the Marchesa and her son, and who had resolved meekly to bear all Mademoiselle Monti's cutting words, and the daily petty annoyances to which she contrived to subject her, sooner than leave those

who she knew stood so much in need of a friend near them. Lucy had grown so fond of her as to refuse the attendance of any one else ; and Francisco, as he grew older, positively doated upon his *bonne*. At last, after nine months' struggle, during which Mademoiselle Monti had seemed to vie with Maria in her unremitting attention to the health both of her sister-in-law and nephew, the young lady triumphed—if *that* could be called a triumph which was attained by the lowest and vilest deceit. Francesca had told her brother, from time to time, of her missing various little articles of jewellery from Lucy's room, and had offered half a suggestion, that perhaps it would be as well to see that she did not throw them away, unmindful of their value. Her liking for dress and ornaments, and her attention to personal appearance, still clung to the Marchesa in her fallen state, and nothing pleased her more than a gift of a ring, brooch, or bracelet ; but she knew not and cared not whether it were a bit of painted glass, or the most costly diamond. She would sit for hours in the sunshine, weaving garlands of flowers for her own head, and as happy as possible each time that she gazed upon herself in a fresh one. At length, Francesca declared that she had missed from her own apartment, into which Lucy never entered, a diamond ring containing her parents' hair. She mentioned this to her brother in the nursery, and accompanied the piece of information with such a meaning look at Maria, that the latter for once forgot her resolution of bearing every thing in silence ; and, bursting into tears, entreated that all her drawers and boxes might be searched.

"I am afraid you are not in earnest in the expression of that wish," said Francesca, sternly.

Exulting in the anticipation of proving her innocence to her master, Maria opened one or two drawers, and implored Mademoiselle Monti to come and inspect them thoroughly. After some pretended reluctance, the latter yielded to her solicitations, and to the advice of her brother ; and, having taken the most hasty survey of the already opened drawers, she walked, as if by chance, towards a chest which she knew was seldom used by Maria ; and, lifting the lid, she started back with well-assumed horror at the sight of the missing articles, which she had placed there with her own hands.

In vain were the tears and protestations of Mademoi-

selle Salvi, or the grief of Francisco. His aunt observed that he must learn to think no more of the bad woman, to whom they could only regret that they had suffered him to attach himself so much. Maria went; and, from that day, the little fellow shrank more than ever from the society and caresses of Francesca, and avoided, as far as possible, the companionship of his new *bonne*, passing all the time he could with his mother or father, according as his aunt happened to be absent from either parent.

After the first twelvemonth had elapsed, the Marchese would sometimes absent himself from home for a few days, and visit Florence or his marine villa. We all know from observation, if not from actual experience, how soon we become habituated, and in a measure reconciled, to any lasting calamity; and, instead of stigmatizing others as heartless and indifferent because they share this universal lot, we should rather thank God that it is so—that He has so constituted our human nature as to render it incapable of eternal grief in this world, and has reserved that bitter and undying portion in the next, for those who have refused to profit by His temporary chastisements here below. It is indeed a poet's fiction, to imagine that one overwhelming affliction can occupy and engross the heart throughout life, to the exclusion of all consolation and happiness—at least such cases are rare, and surely most pitiable. With most of us the first keen edge of sorrow gradually wears away; though with those who are gifted with deep feelings and strong affections, there will be ever-recurring moments of such intense bitterness and anguish, as to make us wonder at ourselves for the comparative cheerfulness and sense of enjoyment which we cannot but acknowledge that we have experienced.

We see a smile on the face, and we hear careless words from the lips, of one who has lately consigned to the tomb a parent, a child, or even the husband or wife of their bosom; and we come away, and pronounce a severe judgment on their coldness and want of heart, and inwardly thank God that we are differently constituted. And yet, could we again look upon the object of our censure half an hour afterwards, in the solitude of their chamber, we might have reason to reproach ourselves for having so cruelly misjudged a fellow-creature; for then—when alone with Him who has

taken from them the desire of their eyes, and who alone can comfort those whom He has smitten—then nature will find relief in the outpouring of feelings justly deemed too sacred to be displayed before indifferent eyes, and we should see no lack of those outward expressions of grief, which we are so apt to consider as the sole index of the heart's emotions. A few months later, and perhaps the case becomes our own:—we act in a similar manner, and are similarly judged and commented upon: and it bitterly recurs to us how little forbearance we have shown in speaking of others—how little we have a right to expect for ourselves. And as it is with death, so it is more or less with every kind of sorrow; whether it be the loss of fortune, the desertion of friends whom we had once deemed faithful, or even the more constant thorn in the side of daily beholding, for months and years, one whom we dearly love condemned to the endurance of bodily or mental suffering, which lies beyond our reach to cure, perhaps to mitigate.

And so now, when it was seen that Fabio's spirits were improving—that he could sometimes laugh and play with his boy as though he had nought to trouble or afflict him—that he could occasionally leave home for a week or more, and seem better and more cheerful for the variety—people began to say—

“Ah! *he* has soon got over his poor wife's madness! I thought how it would be, though I did not say so, when he appeared so cast down and broken-hearted about it at first! Certainly, to look at him now, and hear him talk, nobody could imagine *he* feels his troubles much!”

Most untrue and unjust were these remarks: Fabio's altered state of mind and course of action were but the natural results produced by time, and by the buoyancy of youth and health: still he mourned deeply, sincerely, over the wreck of his beloved wife, and, whether present with her, or absent from her, she was rarely out of his thoughts for an hour together. When he left her, it was, as he firmly believed, under the guardianship of the kindest and tenderest of sisters; and his grief and indignation would have known no bounds at the idea of her not being gratified in the slightest thing in which it was possible to comply with her wishes.

But his was the common lot. Still, as in the days of yore,

we persecute them whom God has smitten : we vex them whom He has wounded. Fabio's neighbours and acquaintances—ay, and some of his so-called friends—were ready, with their cutting remarks and uncharitable censures, to strike another blow upon the fallen. Once, when dining with Mr. Deloraine at a *table d'hôte* at Florence, he overheard his own name mentioned at the further end by persons who were not aware of his presence ; and his attention being thus attracted, he listened, and some observations on his indifference, neglect—even his cruelty—towards his afflicted wife, reached his ears. He felt them bitterly, unjust as he knew them to be ; and when, on leaving the room after dinner, he encountered the party, and one of the ladies, whose voice had been loudest in his condemnation, held out her hand to him, and asked most affectionately after the Marchesa and his son, adding a whispered assurance of sympathy, he had but just sufficient command over himself to utter the necessary civilities, and coldly thank her for her inquiries.

Francesca had taken care to supply Maria's vacant place by a young French woman, more adapted to her own views and purposes. Adèle (for such was her name) was a willing tool in her hands, as well as an able coadjutor, for she was scarcely less cunning than Mademoiselle Monti herself. Lucy had evinced some uneasiness at first at the disappearance of her favourite attendant, and had in consequence been cross for some days—a most unusual occurrence with her. She and Francisco seemed to vie with each other in their dislike of the new-comer, but she was all apparent devotion to them both ; and being clever, quick, and useful, the Marchese had no objection to make to his sister's choice.

Francisco had just completed his fourth year when his father left home to spend a few days at his villa on the Mediterranean. He was joined there by Mr. Deloraine, who was on his way back to England ; and Fabio received such excellent news from Mademoiselle Monti of his wife and child, that he was induced to yield to the persuasions of his friend, and accompany him as far as Geneva, to visit some mutual friends. He proposed being absent a month longer, and wrote to his sister to that effect. Francisco had now grown into a very fine little fellow ; and though not actually a strong, hearty-looking child, he was very far from

being a delicate one, and it was quite an event when he was unwell for a day or two. His amiable aunt had availed herself of her brother's occasional absences to take or send him out in unfavourable weather, with the hope of his catching cold; or in the neighbourhood of infection, of which she of course pretended total ignorance, and expressed great horror, if by chance any one mentioned to her afterwards the danger her nephew had incurred. But it was all in vain: the boy *would not die*.

"But die he *must* and *shall*!" murmured Francesca to herself, as, the night after she received her brother's letter, she lay tossing about on her sleepless pillow, and revolving her fiendish plans. "I would fain have been spared the necessity of doing the deed myself; but, if it must be, my arm *shall not* quiver, my nerve *shall not* fail me. I am already odious to the child; and, as he grows older, he will learn to suspect as well as to hate me, and my task will be a far harder one. No! the hour is come; and shall Francesca shrink for the first time, when the die of her fortunes is about to be cast? Have not I devoted my soul and all its energies for years to the attainment of my life's one object; and shall I tamely submit to be baulked of it, because, forsooth, the existence of a baby must be the sacrifice? I shudder, because my hands are as yet unstained with blood; because I have never yet looked upon death, and known that it was caused by me. And, if there *should* be an hereafter—if the undying fire should be no fable—But this is weakness indeed—most base, most contemptible! I can feel the cold damps standing upon my brow, and I am trembling like a young, silly, puling girl. But the moment of indecision is past; the time for wavering is gone by, and has left me only more steeled to my purpose. I must no longer delay; every year increases *his* chances of escape from me, while those of his dying a natural death are poorer and more scanty. Fabio will be absent a whole month—next time he might perhaps take the child with him, as he has often talked of doing—as yet, he places the most unshaken, the most implicit confidence in me" (here Francesca's eyes gleamed with a mingled expression of triumph and subtlety);—"now, then, is my hour!"

Mademoiselle Monti had little sleep that night; but her wakefulness enabled her to mature her plans before she rose the next morning.

The evening proved most beautiful, and Lucy strolled into the garden to enjoy it, accompanied by her boy. He had been taking a long ramble that day with Adèle, and was so completely tired that by his own wish he went early to rest, leaving his mother out of doors.

It was indeed a glorious night. Lucy stood on a raised part of the garden, on a level with the wall, and looked down upon the vale of the Arno, spreading far before her, and lighted up by the soft clear radiance of the moon, and the countless stars above her. The air was laden with the rich perfume of the orange blossoms, wafted towards her by the gentle breeze which fanned her brow, and prevented the heat from being absolutely oppressive. The fire-flies were abroad in innumerable array, and, with their sparkling brightness, added another to the numerous charms of an Italian night. A deep stillness reigned around, and the entire repose of the scene sank upon Lucy's heart with a soothing, softening power.

And as she stood and gazed, suddenly, and as if by magic, an evening no less lovely, four years ago, recurred to her mind. Fabio had been with her, and they had stood together on that very spot, and she had repeated to him those beautiful lines—

“Fair Italy!

Thou art the garden of the world, the home

Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;

Even in thy desert, what is like to thee?

Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste

More rich than other climes' fertility;

Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced

With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.”

The whole scene flashed across her memory, which retained it without an effort, and she became aware of a power of thought and sensation long unknown to her. She felt as one awakening from a confused and troubled dream, and striving to collect her yet half-slumbering senses. By degrees a light dawned upon her darkened soul—a returning perception of the inward vision, obscured for more than a twelvemonth past, but now struggling forth again, as it appeared to her, without any previous notice, though in reality her mind had for some weeks been unconsciously advancing towards the recovery of its reason and intelligence.

This gradual change in the Marchesa had been as little noted by others as by herself; for Francesca, deeming herself secure of her first victim, had in a great measure discontinued her once frequent visits to her sister's apartment; and when she did go to her, it was for form's sake, and to prevent any suspicion, on the part of her brother, that aught was left undone that should be done for his wife. Mademoiselle Monti had never told Adèle (notwithstanding the extent to which she had already confided in her) how earnestly she desired the continuance of the Marchesa's mental disorder; and the *bonne*, not thinking it a subject of any interest to her who was in reality her mistress, had never communicated to her the observations she had inwardly made on Madame Monti having become so much more sensible in her remarks and answers. Francisco was of course too young to be capable of expressing his feelings on so difficult a topic, though the change in his mother produced an impression on him.

Lucy stood for many minutes still and silent, as if fearing to dispel the new-born charm that floated over her. She was hopelessly bewildered, when she endeavoured to unravel the tangled thread running through the last year of her destiny; all was clouded and confused, or perhaps, to speak more truly, it was to her as though it had never been. She thought of her husband and child, and gradually she recalled every thing to that last dreadful night, which even now she could not grasp with any thing like distinctness of memory.

The sound of approaching footsteps broke upon her ear and interrupted her reverie. Her first impulse was to exclaim, "Fabio!" and spring forwards to join him as in those happy evenings of old. But the tones of another voice arrested her; that voice, from whose half-whispered, creeping accents she had ever instinctively recoiled. So she retreated to her original position, behind a tall and spreading shrub, which effectually screened her from the sight of the passers-by. It was at a corner, where saunterers in a garden so often pause, because it is natural to do so, before turning round to retrace their steps; but it happened also to be the spot the farthest removed from the house, and consequently the one where there was the least chance of being overheard from it—a consideration which was not without its weight with the principal speaker, nor, as her speech proceeded, with the

listener. They were Mademoiselle Monti and Adèle, as the reader will have already guessed, who thus unknowingly exposed Lucy to the unpleasant alternative of remaining where she was in the character of an eavesdropper, or coming out suddenly upon them, before she had had time to muster courage for such an interview in her altered state. While she hesitated—even at the very moment when she was stepping forth—she heard the name of Francisco from the lips of his aunt, and, seized with an instinctive foreboding of danger to her child, she paused. But the sound of her light footstep had reached the quick ear of her sister-in-law, who broke off abruptly in the midst of what she was saying, and asked Adèle what that rustling noise was?

"I saw the cat run across the path, Signorina, and go into the bushes—I should think, perhaps, the sound came from her—I did not hear any thing myself."

After looking suspiciously around her, and finding that all was silent, Mademoiselle Monti resumed—

"Adèle, as I was saying, I believe I may trust you fully, and again I assure you that your fidelity shall not go unrequited. Once more, I ask you, are you prepared to obey me implicitly? and will you swear secrecy as to what I am about to communicate to you?"

"By all my hopes of Heaven," began the French girl; but Francesca stopped her by saying—

"*Bah! bah!* Adèle; such oaths avail me little. You had better swear by all your hopes of an earthly reward—by all your fears of my vengeance if you dare to betray me!" and she cast a look upon her young companion, which, bold and cunning as Adèle was, made her quail before it, as she felt that her superior, both in determination and craftiness, stood beside her.

"*Comme vous voulez, Mademoiselle,*" she rejoined; "I well know it is to my interest to serve you, and execute your commands; and I will do so to the best of my ability."

"That will do," said Francesca. "You see that the long confirmed insanity of the Marchesa places that little boy entirely in my hands. Now, Adèle, I have sent to Doctor Martyn to tell him that I think my nephew is likely to have the same sort of rash to which he was subject last spring; and I have asked him to prescribe for him some cooling draughts, similar to those which removed it before.

The boy will go into Florence to-morrow morning with my note, and will bring the medicine from the chemists. You, Adèle, are to be on the watch for his return; *you* are to take the bottles from his hand, and bring them straight to me. But you are not to mention to any one that I told you all this; on the contrary, if hereafter you should be questioned about them, you are to declare that they were brought to you by one of the servants—that obstinate little thing, Gabrielle, you can say—and that my only orders to you were, to be sure that your young master should take them regularly. Their effect upon him will be *very* gradual; but, Adèle, I have my own good reasons for wishing them to affect the child in a different way from what Doctor Martyn will intend; and so I shall change them, or add to them, for that purpose. Do you understand me, Adèle?"

The French girl was silent for a time; she then replied, in a quick, decided tone—

"A half confidence, in a case like this, is of no use whatever, Signorina. You want to kill the child." (Francesca did not move a muscle; Lucy almost shieked, but she felt how all important was her self-command at that moment, and she stifled the rising cry.) "Now, I have no love for him, and he has always hated me; but still death is an unpleasant thing to deal with, and I must run a considerable risk in obeying you. Therefore, I must have a strong inducement for doing so; and I demand to know, in the event of our plot being successful, the amount of the reward which is to pay me for my services, and to ensure my eternal silence."

She looked steadily at Francesca, feeling that she had the advantage even over the superior understanding to which she had bowed a few minutes before. Mademoiselle Monti was not altogether unprepared for this; and, without hesitation, she answered—

"An immediate present of a hundred pounds; an annuity of thirty pounds until I come into possession of my fortune, when it shall be doubled. Will that content you?"

"Perfectly, Signorina," returned Adèle, who had nothing in the world except the amount of her wages, and knew that, were she turned adrift to-morrow, she had no means of obtaining the shadow of a respectable character, to enable her to get another place.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR at least half an hour after the disappearance of Francesca and her attendant, the Marchess stood motionless on the spot where she had overheard the foregoing conversation. For a few seconds she half-doubted whether her reason had in truth re-visited her, or whether she had not rather become a victim to that most awful and tremendous visitation—conscious madness. But, as the first shock subsided, the clearness of her ideas and perceptions banished any such notion.

“Oh, my God!” murmured the wretched mother; “is it for this that Thou hast restored to me the light of my soul, only to show me the deep abyss of misery that is yawning before me? How can I rejoice in the returning powers of my mind, when they only enable me to discover Francesca’s hellish machinations, without any means of averting them? For who will listen to the madwoman? who will believe that my words are not the mere idle ravings of insanity, and even regard them as an additional proof of it? I can now recall the way in which I have been addressed or answered of late, and how strange and unaccountable all has appeared to me!

“I must see Fabio! I must speak calmly; and, before I try to persuade him of the fearful danger to which our darling child is exposed, I must convince him, by my remarks on indifferent subjects, that the hour of darkness has gone by—that his wife is restored to him! And even, if—as some dim and terrible remembrance seems to warn me—even if he has ceased to love me—if another has torn his affections from me—still he *must* listen to the strong voice of nature—to the mother pleading for the child. My boy! my boy! you shall not die but by the hand of God; and who knows

that He has not graciously vouchsafed to give me back my reason, that I may save your precious life?"

A flood of tears came to poor Lucy's relief; and, yielding to the torrent of her emotions, she sank upon the earth, overcome by the full sense of all that was hanging over her. But it was not for long that she suffered her weakness thus to master her; she reflected that, without calmness, all her efforts would be in vain; and repressing all outward signs of agitation, save a trembling frame and a tottering gait, which her utmost endeavours failed to render steady, she returned to the house.

Her first question certainly did not tend towards establishing in the mind of the person she addressed, any conviction of her recovered intellect. She asked the servant she met, who chanced to be a valet, whether his master was at home that evening? and flattered herself that the man could not fail to remark the alteration in her voice and manner, for she was wholly unconscious of her husband's departure for the sea-side, though he had bidden her farewell, and had tried to make her understand where he was going.

"The Marchese is out this evening," answered the man hurriedly, and with little respect towards his mistress; for he was a domestic of Mademoiselle Monti's choice, and, in the absence of Fabio, cared not how he spoke to Lucy. He was passing on when the lady addressed him again—

"Is the Marchese gone into Florence? Did he leave word at what hour he should come home?"

"No," said Filippo, "it was hardly likely he should, considering that he has gone off to Switzerland with Mr. Deloraine—to England, perhaps, for aught I know or care."

"Switzerland!" ejaculated Lucy; but, recollecting herself, she added—"ah! true, I had forgotten. Do you happen to know his address, Filippo?"

The man stared at her for an instant; and, muttering some expression of impatience, he hurried into the kitchen.

The Marchesa went to her room, and flung herself upon her bed, almost frantic from despair. She saw how entirely she had committed herself in displaying to Filippo her ignorance of her husband's absence from home, that absence which seemed to destroy her last hope of saving her child—and she dreaded lest, in every step she took, and in every word she uttered, she should expose her forgetfulness of recent occurrences, and

throw herself more completely into the power of her sister-in-law. Never, at any time, had she been a match for her in craft and cunning ; and what chance had she now, when every action and every word would be turned against her, and brought forward as an additional proof of her madness ? In the extremity of her anguish she rose from the bed, and approached the window. It was a lofty one ; and as she looked down upon the earth, so far beneath her, she grew dizzy—her brain reeled, and the idea of suicide flashed across her mind. How easy it would be, by one plunge from that giddy height, to terminate a life of suffering, and to find the deep repose of the grave ! But this dark thought was but for a moment. True it was, that she was destitute of all earthly friends and comforters ; that she had none in this world to whom she could look for guidance or support ; but in that bitter hour, God drew her soul upwards to Himself, and a still small voice within bade her trust in Him.

And that still small voice, which has remained with us, though the age of prophets and of miracles has passed away, did not speak in vain. They who saw visions, and they who dreamed dreams, were ever the favoured few, and exist no more among the children of men ; but we have a no less high and holy witness of God's faithful presence in the light which He pours upon our inmost hearts, when the torrent of affliction has wellnigh overwhelmed them.

And Lucy prayed earnestly, devoutly—as the best pray but too seldom—as she and many others had never prayed at all ; and she arose from her knees with a calm upon her spirit, which was no longer a vain semblance, the result of her own unaided efforts ; but a strong reality, which nerved her mind for reflection, and her body for action. Long, however, did she ponder in vain. No feasible scheme suggested itself, by the adoption of which she could frustrate Mademoiselle Monti's designs upon Francisco's life. If she wrote to Fabio, the boy's fate would be decided ere the letter could reach him ; if she appealed to Francesca herself, she knew her well enough to be convinced that she would immediately place her under restraint, and paralyze her last hope of effecting any thing.

At length an idea suddenly dawned upon her, and, in the course of another hour, had formed itself into a plan which,

however desperate, was the only one that occurred to her, and, in the event of its failure, could scarcely make the case worse than it was already. We shall best unfold this plan by describing Lucy's line of action.

She addressed one short but fervent prayer to Him who has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" and prepared herself for what she had to do. She speedily exchanged the light evening dress she wore for the darkest and quietest her wardrobe could supply, and muffled herself in a thick shawl and deep veil. She went to her purse. Alas! here was a fresh difficulty, which she had not calculated upon. It contained only some worthless coins, which had been given her for playthings, when she had believed them to be gold. This startling discovery fairly overcame poor Lucy; but reflection soon convinced her that she must proceed as best she might, without the powerful aid of money.

The clock was telling forth the hour of midnight, when Lucy quitted her room, with a step scarcely less soft and stealthy than that of Francesca herself, though with far different designs than those which were wont to occupy the mind of the ruthless Italian girl. The Marchesa glided, unseen and unheard, along the corridor, and down one flight of stairs, which led her to the door of the apartment in which Francisco was slumbering peacefully. His little bed stood in a recess into which it just fitted, while Adèle occupied her own in another recess, with falling curtains, that enabled her to be invisible when she chose. These curtains being down when Lucy entered the room, naturally made her suppose that Adèle had gone to rest, and she could only hope and trust that she was sleeping too soundly to be easily awakened. Lucy's footfall had ever been a light one, and now it was noiseless as that of a fairy as she approached her unconscious child. She gazed upon his young and innocent beauty, and marvelled, as well she might, that any human being, and least of all his father's cherished sister, who should have been a mother to the motherless boy, could entertain an evil thought towards him.

She touched him gently, but he moved not. Exhausted with the fatigues of the preceding day, his repose was even deeper than was his wont. Then she bent down and kissed him, and this time he opened his eyes, and was about to call

her by her name, when she checked the rising exclamation by placing her finger on her lips. She put her mouth close to his ear, and whispered—

“Francisco, get out of bed as softly as you can, and follow me into the passage; but do not answer me, or you will wake Adèle, and she would prevent you from going with me.”

The child replied by springing from his bed, and, to his mother's horror, drawing aside the curtains which concealed the other recess from their view. But Francisco knew what he was about; for, on looking at the bed, Lucy saw, to her inexpressible relief, that it was empty. She scarcely knew, however, whether to be glad or sorry that Adèle was still up; for she dreaded meeting her on their way to the hall door, though she was thankful to be alone with the child. She opened a drawer, and took out some clothes which would not be so readily missed as those on the chair by his bedside; and she told Francisco to dress himself in the former with all possible expedition, and began to assist him in doing so. Her tone was one of mingled affection and authority; and the child obeyed her without a word, seeming to feel instinctively that they were no longer upon an equality. His toilette was soon completed, and Lucy laid his night-dress upon the bed, and carefully closed the curtains, having first ascertained from the boy that he was frequently in the habit of doing so after Adèle had left the room, because, he said, he liked to be all alone better than to be with her.

“Francisco, have you any money?” asked his mother.

He had a little, he said, which his papa had given him just before he went away. His purse was soon found. It was true, it contained but the value of a few English shillings; but that was something, and in her circumstances was not to be despised.

Thus hastily equipped, and scantily furnished, the mother and her son shrank as fugitives from their own home. Lucy carried Francisco in her arms through the house, thinking that they should thus proceed more noiselessly; and her precaution was not a vain one; for, as they passed the door of Francesca's apartment, the Marchesa observed that it stood ajar, and she could overhear the voices of Mademoiselle Monti and Adèle engaged in low and earnest converse. In less than two minutes they had reached the principal entrance;

and here Lucy paused in dismay at the sight of the bolts and bars which obstructed their progress, and could not be undrawn without noise. An instant's thought, and she went into the back drawing-room, softly closed the door, and as softly unbarred the shutter; and thus she succeeded in escaping undetected from the precincts through a yard behind the villa. She set Francisco down, and, taking hold of his hand, she looked around her.

The brilliancy of the evening had passed away, and thick, heavy thunder-clouds obscured the light of the heavenly orbs; but she knew her way, and rejoiced in the friendly darkness, believing it would favour their escape. Regardless of the vivid and almost blinding flashes of lightning; scarcely hearing the loud, crashing thunder, which seemed to burst directly over their heads; onward she pressed, the child running manfully along by her side, and doing his very best to conceal the awe he could not help feeling, at being thus exposed in midnight obscurity to the full fury of an Italian storm.

But the rain began to descend, in drops so large and thick as to resemble a falling cascade; and Francisco, breathless, exhausted, and drenched to the skin, could no longer proceed except at a foot-pace. His mother lifted him in her arms, and bore him along; struggling with the might of the elements, which appeared as though in league against them.

They were bending their steps towards Florence, but not by the most public and frequented track; for Lucy had chosen a bye-path (well known to her and Fabio in former days), thinking she should thus make certain of not encountering any one who would recognize her; and, should their departure be discovered before morning, the pursuers would naturally take the only road with which she was supposed to be acquainted. She had hitherto been guided by the frequent flashes of lightning, but that was now abating; though the rain continued to pour down, and the darkness was entire.

Not a word was uttered either by herself or Francisco; but from time to time she kissed him, and pressed him to her, and reassured his courage and his spirits.

At length the idea came across her that she had missed the right path—that she had lost her way, and knew not whither she was wandering. It was even so, as a faint

flash of light convinced her. While she hesitated, the little boy spoke for the first time—

"Mamma," he said, "are we going much further? I hope not, for I am so wet and tired."

She was about to answer him, when she felt her hand touched by something cold and clammy, from which she recoiled with an involuntary shriek. In her terror, she hastened on a few paces; and her dress rustled against something which seemed to be pursuing her. She ran as fast as her failing limbs would carry her; but still it followed, till she stumbled over a large stone, and fell, her head striking heavily against it. The shock rendered her insensible; and, when she recovered her consciousness, the grey light of morning had already dawned, and she found herself lying in a small shed, in a field bordering on the narrow lane where she had fallen. Francisco was kneeling on one side of her, chafing her hand, and sobbing as if his heart would break. At her feet stood a poor deformed boy, whose vacant countenance proclaimed him to be an idiot, no less than his worn and tattered garments, and his naked feet told their sad tale that he was of the forlorn and deserted ones of this world. The shed which he inhabited, and to which he had dragged Lucy in her senseless condition, was literally tumbling to pieces; and the roof being full of holes, and three sides exposed to the outward air, the miserable tenement could scarcely afford a shelter from the summer's heat or the winter's cold.

But the instinct of brotherly kindness and good-will lingered with one who could have experienced little in his own hapless career but harshness and neglect; for he had taken off his apology for a coat, and, wrapping it together, had placed it under Lucy's head by way of a pillow. He held in his hand a dirty stale crust of bread; and, as soon as she opened her eyes, he uttered a sort of cry expressive of his satisfaction, and held it out towards her. She shook her head; but he was not so easily discouraged, for he went close to her, and endeavoured to force the bread into her hand. But, finding that she really did not wish to have it, he broke it in two pieces, giving the larger share to Francisco, and ravenously munching the other himself, as though he had not tasted food for many hours. It was he who had crept from his hiding-place the night before, on hearing the

sound of footsteps ; and he had touched Lucy, not with any intention of alarming her, but with the view of ascertaining who or what it was that had sought his lonely haunts at that unusual hour. It was he who had carried Lucy to the shed after her fall ; and had terrified Francisco by his low unearthly moanings, for he had no power of distinct articulation, and was partially deaf.

Hungry as Francisco now was, he was not hungry enough to relish the coarse, dirty fare presented to him ; but, as daylight had dawned, and he had seen the watchful care shown by his strange and uncouth companion towards his poor mother, his terror had vanished, and a sense of gratitude usurped its place ; and it was with a gentle hand and a courteous "*Grazie*," that he returned the bread untasted to the boy, who lost not a moment in devouring it, and then ran and fetched some water, which he brought to Lucy in a cocoa-nut shell. It was pure and fresh, and eagerly did she and Francisco drink of it.

The Marchesa addressed the poor fellow, and asked him what his name was, and where he lived ; but she quickly perceived that he was unable to answer her rationally, or even to make his words intelligible, and she could only thank him by laying her hand on his, and smiling kindly upon him. He smiled in return, and nodded and laughed. Lucy tried to raise herself, and found that she could do so more easily than she had expected, and that she did not appear to have sustained any serious injury. She was, however, too giddy to stand alone, and was obliged to sit down upon the floor ; for chair, or substitute for chair, there was none. She drew her boy towards her ; and, remembering that he had been soaked through and through a few hours before, and had since remained in this shed without taking off his clothes, she shuddered to think that she had perhaps exposed him to a no less risk than he would have run by staying at home. But, in answer to her anxious inquiries, he assured her that he felt no chill, though he had been very cold an hour ago. Meanwhile their companion had collected a few sticks, and set fire to them ; and Lucy took off her little boy's coat, which was still wet, and told him to hold it to the flame to dry, while he gave himself a good warming. He then laid down by his mother's side ; and, in a few minutes, they were both in a sound sleep.

The sun was high in the heavens when they awoke, much rested and refreshed. The boy was standing at their feet, in the same attitude in which Lucy had first seen him. Poor Francisco was now so very hungry that he would scarcely have refused the coarse black bread, could he have obtained it; but it was all gone, and he and his mother were forced to breakfast on a draught of the fresh cool water, which had been so welcome some hours before. Lucy was by this time sufficiently recovered to stand without difficulty; and she went outside the shed, and looked around her.

The prospect was not a very encouraging one. Not the trace of a human habitation was to be seen; and she was utterly at a loss which path to pursue. But something must be attempted; so, taking Francisco by the hand, she made signs to the boy, intimating that they must proceed on their journey. The poor fellow seemed to understand her meaning, and in his turn signified to her his intention of being their escort. They followed him for lack of a better guide; though it was quite impossible to make him comprehend that they wanted to go to Florence. He led them on, till a sharp turn suddenly disclosed to their view a small village or hamlet lying at the foot of the mountain.

As they approached it, they saw it was a poor miserable little place; but Lucy hailed it with delight, in the hope of obtaining a guide to Florence, and some breakfast for her hungry child. She observed that, as they neared the cottages, or rather hovels, their companion glanced uneasily around him, though once or twice he stooped to pick some dry bones and other refuse, which he immediately concealed in his pocket. Apparently, his fears were not without foundation; for he was in the act of possessing himself of a small piece of bread lying on a door-step, when a tall, gaunt, dirty-looking woman rushed forth from the interior of the dwelling, and, snatching away his newly acquired treasure, she struck him a blow which almost knocked him down, and, as it was, sent him reeling into the middle of the road. This was the boy's mother, who, as the Marchesa afterwards learned, had, in conjunction with his father, turned him out of doors, and forced him to seek an abode for himself, as an useless and abhorred encumbrance. Once in two days, a piece of the bread which he had wished to share with the wayfarers was provided for him, and he came regularly to

the village to fetch it ; but this was not his day for being supplied with food, and his picking up the bit, which had been dropped by his brother, was regarded as an act of pilfering.

Shocked and disgusted, Lucy turned away. She had been on the point of seeking the information she required at that very cottage ; but now she would have preferred trusting to her own resources to entering such a den of barbarity. She walked on, accompanied by the poor idiot, who had rallied from the effect of the stunning blow ; indeed, he was too much accustomed to be knocked and kicked about to take any great heed of the salutation he had just received. He ran on before Lucy until he stopped at another door.

A girl, whose whole appearance was most poverty-stricken, but whose face was kind and gentle, came to it ; and, at first catching sight only of the boy, she went in again, and returned with a large hunch of bread, which she gave him. She started with surprise when her eye fell on the figures of the Marchesa and her little son, and was speechless from the excess of her astonishment. It was probably the first time in her life that she had seen any one at all resembling Lucy ; and, even in her comparative disguise, she seemed to her as a being of another order, if not of another world.

But the lady's soft voice and smile soon re-assured her, and she cordially invited her and the child to walk in, and partake of such refreshment as she had to offer. They were but too thankful to accept her hospitality ; but, when they looked round for their companion, he was nowhere to be seen. Satisfied with having conducted them to a place where, from his own experience, he knew they would meet with kindness, and having left them in better hands than his own, he had taken his departure ; and, rushing swiftly past the dreaded spot of his parents' abode, he was already out of sight.

The girl explained to them the desolate condition of the poor boy, and how she sometimes gave him a piece of any victual she had by her. She did not tell them how this bounty was always saved from her own daily bread, and herself stinted in consequence. She had the sole care of an aged and bed-ridden father ; and often, after supplying his wants, she had but just enough to keep body and soul together.

Something of this Lucy surmised, from her tattered clothing, and from the scanty amount of the provender contained in the dwelling ; and she had read, if her own observation had not taught her, that it is often among the poor and needy, that the highest and noblest examples of self-abnegation and self-denial are to be found. Not the one great sacrifice of a lifetime, seen and applauded by an admiring world ; but the daily and hourly renunciation of self in every want and wish, known to few, save to Him on whose altar no more acceptable offering can be laid. Surely, if we could realize and estimate, in any thing like their due proportions, the sacrifices so willingly and unostentatiously made by many of our fellow-creatures for the sake of others, we should shrink back appalled from the contemplation of our own selfishness—our reluctance to give up the smallest portion of our time or inclinations to those who possess the greatest claims upon us.

Some such reflections were passing through the mind of Lucy, as, while the girl busied herself in preparing their homely repast, she looked back on the days of her own unthinking prosperity. How little had she then anticipated that a day would come, when she and her child would be thankful for the coarse black bread—the meanest peasant's fare ! Such as it was, however, Francisco devoured it eagerly, with all the zest of real hunger ; and, when the girl had procured him a little milk, his satisfaction was complete. His only distress was, that he could not make his mother eat as good a breakfast as himself ; for the strong excitement and fatigue of the last few hours had deprived her of her usual good appetite.

Lucy asked their young hostess whether she could furnish her with a guide to Florence, saying, that she was most anxious to proceed there immediately. The girl hesitated at first ; but answered that she had a cousin, who she believed had once visited the city, and who perhaps would remember the way, and could conduct them thither. Her father being asleep, she could leave him for a few minutes, and would go in search of this cousin. They returned together ; and Lucy's proposed guide proved to be a girl of about fifteen, who said that it was three years since she had been to Florence, but she would do her best to lead the travellers there safely. Lucy paused ; but soon she reflected that probably she should not meet with a better informed

conductress, and might place herself and her defenceless child in the hands of a less trusty one, so she resolved to accept the young maiden's offer.

She opened Francisco's purse, and took from it four out of the eight small coins it contained, resisting the impulse of giving them all away now, as it was possible she might want them before she reached the city. Her hostess at first put the money aside, saying, she had had nothing to give them which was worth half a quarter of that sum; but Lucy pointed to her helpless parent, and mentioned the idiot boy, and the girl's face brightened, and she no longer refused the money. And with many warm thanks and blessings, and the promise that, should it ever be in her power to befriend those who had so generously assisted her in her need, she would not forget them, she and Francisco resumed their journey.

Little more occurred worthy of observation until they reached Florence. They did not once miss their path, or take a wrong turning; but Lucy found, from the distance they travelled, that they had wandered the preceding night much farther than she had had any idea of at the time. The child had made so good a breakfast that he was less tired than his mother, who was obliged from sheer exhaustion to sit down again and again during their long and wearying walk; and it was not till eight o'clock in the evening that they came to their journey's end.

This delay was of the utmost service to them, though they knew it not; for their flight from the villa had been detected not half an hour after they had left it, and Francesca had immediately despatched messengers to Florence, with directions to secure the fugitives. These messengers were told (what Mademoiselle Monti firmly believed) that there was not the slightest doubt of their overtaking the Marchesa and her son on the road; but, in the event of their not doing so, which she considered almost an impossibility, and of their being equally unsuccessful in their researches at Florence, they were to proceed with all haste to the marine villa near Lucca. Filippo was at the head of the pursuers; and throughout the day had he and his subordinates been diligently inquiring at Doctor Martyn's house, at the hotels, and of course at Casa Monti, for any trace of their mistress and their young master.

It is needless to say that their efforts had been unavailing; and they had been half afraid to communicate the unwelcome intelligence to Francesca, who, uneasy at their protracted absence, had driven into Florence about one o'clock, attended by Adèle, and had herself been one of the most active in prosecuting the search.

Doctor Martyn was out when she went to his house, but she declared her intention of entering, and awaiting his return, which took place soon afterwards. He was quite appalled at the death-like paleness of her cheeks, and still more at the unnaturally fierce, straining expression of her eye; and for the moment was in doubt whether she did not come to him as a patient herself. But she did not long leave his mind in any uncertainty on this topic; for, even before he could utter the usual words of salutation, she addressed him in a nervous, hurried manner—

"Doctor Martyn, you see before you a miserable woman, reduced to the last extremity of despair. You see one who has broken the most solemn trust confided to her by a beloved brother—ignorantly, and involuntarily it is true—but still she has broken it. Ah, merciful Heaven!" she continued, "dash not to the ground my last remaining hope, to which I have hardly the courage to give utterance lest it should prove a false one, and leave me destitute of aught to lean upon!"

The good doctor concluded that this was one of those *bursts* to which we have before hinted that he was by no means a stranger; and, according to his custom, he was silent until it was over. But in this instance he found it difficult to wait with patience; for his thoughts had flown instantly to his unfortunate young countrywoman and her child, in whose fate he took so deep an interest, and he felt convinced that this highly-wrought harangue had reference to them.

Mademoiselle Monti paused, after giving vent to the above speech, and seemed overpowered by her emotions. Doctor Martyn could bear it no longer.

"For Heaven's sake, Mademoiselle Monti, explain yourself! God forbid that any evil should have befallen the Marchesa Monti or her boy!"

"Ay! there it is!" shrieked Francesca, "Then it is even as I thought, and *you know* what has occurred. Doctor Martyn!" and here she looked fiercely at him;

"you have no right to detain them, or to harbour them in your house! You have no right to attend to the frantic ravings of a madwoman, and keep her and my nephew from me, to whose care they were intrusted by the Marchese Monti! I demand that they be instantly restored to me; and, if you refuse, I must seek them at the hands of justice."

Mademoiselle Monti really did imagine that Doctor Martyn had taken in the fugitives, as she could in no other way account in the least for their total and mysterious disappearance, and she thought it most likely that he intended to retain them beneath his roof until he had written to her brother, and ascertained his wishes respecting them; probably suspecting, from Lucy's flight and Francisco's revelations, that all was not as it should be at the villa.

Thus does "conscience make cowards of us all."

Doctor Martyn gazed at his visitor in unfeigned surprise, and said—

"It can be hardly necessary for me to assure you, Mademoiselle Monti, that I am entirely in the dark as to the circumstances to which you allude. If, as I am led to suppose from your words, the Marchesa Monti has left her home, I should in all probability have heard of it, had I not been attending a case in the country from an early hour this morning. Perhaps, when you can control your emotion a little, you will favour me with some more distinct account of this melancholy occurrence?"

The tone in which Doctor Martyn spoke at once convinced Francesca of the truth of what he said, for she well knew that he was no dissembler; so, after entreating him to pardon a wretched girl, whom this dreadful shock had almost deprived of reason, she told him that he had guessed but too truly the cause of her distress, and that she would no longer trespass on his valuable time, as she had only to relate that the Marchesa and the little boy had been missing at half-past twelve o'clock on the night before, and that the most diligent search had hitherto been unavailing in discovering any trace of them.

Here Adèle, who had been whimpering all the time, fell into strong hysterics, and was obliged to be carried into the open air, which was the only thing that would revive her, as Francesca assured Doctor Martyn. He was not to be quite so easily put off, however; and, after ringing the bell, and

desiring that a maid-servant should attend Adèle to the door, he turned again to Mademoiselle Monti, and begged her to inform him whether Madame Monti's manner had been in any way altered previous to her sudden flight. Francesca, who, though dying to be gone, feared to excite his suspicions by appearing unwilling to answer him, said that she had at times detected signs of a greater cunning—less of childishness, and more of insanity, she had thought—but that might have been only fancy. It certainly was; for, as I have before said, she had been completely thrown off her guard for several months past, during which she had scarcely observed her sister-in-law at all.

Doctor Martyn ruminated for some minutes—when a sort of sound resembling a “Hem!” escaped him; and he reproached himself for entertaining such injurious suspicions against one whose distress was perhaps as real as she wished it to appear. He thanked her for her information, and begged that she would not think of leaving his house in her exhausted condition without partaking of some refreshment; adding, that he should of course afford her the best aid in his power in her search after the Marchesa and her son. His refreshment Mademoiselle Monti declined—his aid she dared not, though she would fain have done so; for, since she had been enlightened by Adèle as to the slight symptoms of returning reason evinced by the Marchesa before her flight, she would almost have preferred not finding her sister and nephew at all, to their falling into the hands of Doctor Martyn.

But she had no alternative; and after giving a polite answer to one or two inquiries of the physician, relative to the Marchesa's health and spirits, she went in quest of her suffering attendant, who controlled her hysterics sufficiently to allow of her following her mistress into the carriage, where they burst forth with renewed vehemence. She became suddenly quiet, however, as they drove from the door, and she heard Francesca's low muttered curses and imprecations on the devoted heads of Doctor Martyn, the Marchesa, and Francisco. When the young lady had in some measure relieved her excited feelings by this process, she asked Adèle what they were to do next?

“*Vraiment, Mademoiselle, je ne sais pas,*” was Adèle's very unsatisfactory reply.

"I am sorry your inventive genius is so soon at fault, Adèle," retorted her young mistress, scornfully. "I have always understood that you prided yourself upon it."

Adèle turned sulky; and Mademoiselle Monti, who had no intention of breaking with her at present, commanded her own temper, and observed that Adèle must, like herself, be very tired and hungry, and that they would go to the hotel, where they could procure some refreshment, and where perhaps some rumour of the missing ones had by this time found its way. Adèle graciously assented to this proposition; and, while they are regaling themselves, we will return to Lucy and her boy, whom we left on the outskirts of Florence.

The Marchesa was most thankful to find that they were entering it by a part unknown to her, and unfrequented by her fashionable acquaintances. Here their young conductress bade them adieu; saying, that as she was totally ignorant of the geography of the town, she could be of no further use to them; and she feared that, after the promise she had given to return home without delay, her friends would be vexed and angry at her protracted absence. So, resolutely declining all entreaties, however tempting, to enter the city with them and have some supper, the girl began to retrace her steps as quickly as possible.

Sad and desolate indeed were poor Lucy's feelings as, wearied and footsore, and with her poor little boy clinging to her, she paced along the narrow, dirty streets. It was seldom that she had walked in any part of the town, and never, even in a carriage, had she passed through the quarter she was now treading, forlorn and unprotected. On all sides, her eyes were shocked by the sight of human nature in its most degraded forms, and her ears offended by the lowest and most disgusting language.

Francisco was fairly worn out, and his feet and legs ached so that Lucy, tired as she was, could not forbear making another effort to carry him, and he could no longer restrain his sobs as he laid his head upon her shoulder. They went slowly on, unnoticed, and fortunately unmolested, till they came into another street, where the houses, though mostly poor and shabby, were evidently inhabited by a more respectable class of persons. They had reached one, of which the ground floor was occupied by a small milliner's shop,

greatly superior in point of cleanliness and neatness to those on each side of it. On its doorstep Lucy sank down, utterly exhausted, and unable to proceed further, with her now slumbering burden in her arms. She had been wandering on, without any definite idea of where she was going, but with a vague notion that they were safe only while they were moving. Her senses for the last hour had seemed to be once more forsaking her, though in truth they were but deadened for the time by all she had undergone both in body and mind. She had thought of Doctor Martyn; and had she succeeded in carrying out her original plan of going straight to Florence from the villa Monti, she would at once have sought his house without hesitation; and, had she done so, she must have been overtaken and arrested long before she could have reached it. But the delay in her movements, which had saved her from this, had also given her time for reflection; and she had remembered that her absence, and that of Francisco, must have been discovered at the latest at an early hour that morning, and that servants must have been sent in pursuit of them, which would render it most hazardous for her to appear in any quarter of the town where she could be recognized, at all events for several days to come. Where to take refuge she knew not; and now she was incapable of thinking or acting in any way. Her head drooped back against the wall, and in less than a minute she too was lost to all sense of wretchedness and fatigue, and buried in a profound slumber.

The stars were peeping forth, and shining upon the ancient city; and carriages, filled with gaily dressed, laughing ladies, were returning from their drive in the Caseine, or rolling on towards some scene of rejoicing or festivity; and *she*, who had once been brightest and fairest among them—admired by all, envied by many—she sat with her child at the door of a little shop in an obscure street, thankful for the repose afforded by its hard step and still harder wall, and anxious only to be unobserved and unknown. It was one of the strong, striking contrasts of this world—one of those turns of fate which are perhaps less rare than we are wont to imagine in this changeful life.

Deep as her slumber was, it was not dreamless; and once more in her visions was she amid that gay throng, courted and caressed as in the days of her happiness, with her husband

by her side, as she called his attention to many a well-known face, and wondered why she had not beheld it for so long. And while these acquaintances of a bygone time were floating before her in her sleep, the Marchesa Monti, and her strange sudden flight, were the prevailing topics of conversation among them, as they pursued their various amusements. In their eyes, the beautiful young English lady had long been shrouded in a kind of gloomy mystery, into which they could not penetrate ; and the interest and curiosity that had been excited by the first report of her insanity and its melancholy cause, and had since died away, was now re-awakened by this startling event.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR about an hour Lucy and Francisco slumbered on, unnoticed and undisturbed in the increasing darkness. At the end of that time she became conscious of a soft touch on her shoulder ; but she was too heavily asleep to be more than partially aroused by it, and she relapsed into total oblivion. But now a light flickered across her face—she heard a dim and confused murmur, as of whispering voices, around her—and, starting up, she grasped the child more tightly to her, under the impression that she was discovered by her dreaded pursuers. But the rising shriek died away upon her lips unuttered—her vision of horror was transformed into one of rejoicing, almost too great for her to dare to believe it real ; and though she well knew whose semblance it was that bent over her, and strove gently to raise her, she continued silent, fearing to dissolve the spell, and awake to the sad and wretched consciousness of her actual position.

But it was no delusion. It was Maria Salvi herself—who, no longer able to resist the evidence of her senses, though at the first moment scarcely less incredulous than Lucy herself—it was that faithful attendant who stood beside her lost mistress, and the child she had loved so well.

“Look at me, Signora,” she said, in tones of passionate entreaty. “Speak to me ! have you forgotten your poor Maria ?”

“I have not,” cried Francisco, now fairly aroused ; and, at once recognizing his favourite *bonne*, he sprang into her arms, and covered her with kisses.

Maria wept with joy as she warmly returned his caresses ; and, turning again to Lucy, she begged her to come in.

“Ah, Maria ! why did you ever leave us ?” were the Marchesa’s first words ; “all has gone wrong with us both since you went away.”

"I was driven from you," Maria began ; when Francisco interposed, and, with his little face flushed with indignation, he said—

"Yes, she was driven from us by my wicked aunt, Francesca. I hated her more than ever after that. I have had such a nasty, cross *bonne* since," added he to Maria ; "she was always teaching me to tell lies, and never let me do any thing I liked, when she could help it. Aunt Francesca always said I must do exactly as Adèle told me, but sometimes papa"—

"*Zitto, zitto, carino !*" said Maria, soothingly ; "your poor mamma is very tired and faint, and we must get something for her directly. Do come in, Signora, and lie down on the sofa in my back-room, while I get you some of your favourite tea."

"I hardly know," returned Madame Monti, sinking her voice to a whisper, "whether we dare enter your dwelling. We are at this moment being pursued, and hunted for every where ; and if any one living with you should go out and mention that we are here"—

"There is no danger, Signora : the girls who work for me went home two hours ago, and I have only one young servant, who will not breathe a word of your arrival, after my telling her not."

Thus re-assured, and deeply thankful for her great good fortune in having found refuge with one whom, with the exception of Doctor Martyn, she might consider as her only remaining friend, Lucy accompanied Maria, with her little charge still in her arms, to the small apartment behind the shop. Tea, and bread and butter, and fruit, were ready at hand ; and Maria went herself into the next street to procure something more substantial for her guests, the younger of whom, at least, was perfectly ravenous, and his mother was obliged to restrain his appetite at first, dreading the effects of his devouring so heartily after what to him was an unusual length of abstinence. Lucy stretched her weary limbs on the couch, and refreshed herself with tea, eating what she could, while she gave Maria a hasty sketch of the occurrences of the last twenty-four hours ; suppressing, however, the horrible plot conceived by her sister-in-law, and only hinting generally at ill-treatment and unkindness which she knew to be in store for herself and her son. Madame Monti said, that she had

involuntarily been a listener to a *tête-à-tête* between Francesca and her maid, which had assured her that her anticipations of coming evil were no fancy on her part ; but the deep true love she still bore to her husband, deterred her from exposing, even to Maria, the full extent of his sister's wickedness. But she related enough to shock her hearer, and convince her that any fate must be preferable for both, rather than that they should find themselves again in the power of their ruthless enemy.

Maria was more horrified than astonished by her mistress's recital ; for, from many things, she had conceived the worst possible opinion of Mademoiselle Monti, previous to the *denouement* of the scheme which she had contrived for banishing one who stood so much in her way.

Lucy then begged for the history of Maria's dismissal, and of her life since she had been discarded from the Marchese Monti's service. With the former our readers are already acquainted, and I will enlighten them as to the latter in fewer words than those in which Maria herself communicated it to Lucy.

When she had been driven forth, branded with a dishonest character, from the family she had served with so much fidelity, she had felt too disheartened and dispirited to seek a similar situation elsewhere, even had there been any probability of her obtaining one. Soon after she had removed with them to the villa, when Lucy's malady had first become clearly a confirmed case, an aged relation had died, and she had inherited his small property as heir at law. He had taken no notice of her during his lifetime, and at his decease was found to be intestate. She loved her mistress and her young master far too well to think of leaving them, notwithstanding the little independence which she had thus acquired ; but when turned adrift by Francesca, it had preserved her from poverty, and enabled her to establish herself in the shop in which Lucy now found her. The business, however, was a very unprofitable one, and she was endeavouring to find a purchaser, though she did not hope to meet with one who would make compensation to her for the expense she had unwisely incurred, in entering upon so hazardous an undertaking. She said she was thankful that she had not lost more, and might yet retrieve herself, and subsist comfortably upon the money that still remained

to her, until she could adopt some more feasible plan for occupying herself, and adding to her store.

She told Lucy that she had often, under cover of darkness, or when she had any reason to believe that Mademoiselle Monti was absent for a few hours, stolen unperceived to the neighbourhood of the villa, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the Marchesa or her child. Never had she been gratified but once, when for two minutes she had watched them together at the nursery window. But a large dog began to bark, and she fled hastily; and, on looking back, she saw Filippo, who had been no friend of her's, glancing about in all directions, to ascertain who the intruder could be. Since that night she had made no more attempts, convinced that they could end only in disappointment or detection; and, in the latter case, she knew that Mademoiselle Monti would have sent a messenger to track her to her home, and so have destroyed her last faint prospect of ever rendering any service to the Marchesa or Francisco. "But, thank God! you are both here," continued Maria, warmly; "and I trust safe for the present from all chance of discovery. Thank God! I have a roof, however humble, to shelter you now, and for as long a time as you will make me happy by remaining beneath it."

Lucy answered her affectionately, and they both looked at Francisco, whose attention had soon become wearied in listening to a recital above his comprehension, and who had fallen again into a deep sleep. He was seated in a large *fauteuil*, his head resting on one of his arms; and well might his mother and his *bonne* feel proud as they gazed upon him, for without partiality they might have declared that they had rarely beheld so beautiful a child. It struck them both with a feeling akin to novelty; for Lucy had scarcely had time or leisure for observing him since her senses had returned to her, and Maria had been absent from him more than a year.

"How beautiful!" she murmured; and the eyes of both were suffused with tears, as the mother reflected on the strange and melancholy fate which had driven this fine and promising boy forth by night from his father's house, to fly for his life, in such imminent peril there.

Weary as she was, the Marchesa Monti would fain have discussed some plan for their future movements before

retiring to rest ; but Mademoiselle Salvi saw the absolute necessity that existed for immediate repose, both for mind and body, and forced her to bed, declaring that she would not again be parted from her new-found treasure, but should take possession of the child herself. Lucy was soon laid in a little bed in the room above, the sheets, the curtains, and all around her, vying in cleanliness and neatness with many an humble English habitation which she remembered in old days near her father's house.

And Maria undressed Francisco, but too delighted to resume her former office ; and he only roused himself sufficiently to kiss her and his mother, and tell them how happy he was, and was fast asleep again directly.

Maria was wakeful that night ; she lay revolving all sorts of schemes whereby she might ensure the escape of the fugitives. She did not believe that it would be safe for them to remain in Florence, of which she knew that every hole and corner would be visited by Francesca's emissaries before she abandoned the search ; and she also saw, that if she ventured into the more fashionable parts of the town, with the view of discovering some one who would befriend the Marchesa in this extremity, she should probably meet Mademoiselle Monti or one of the servants ; and her detection must inevitably lead to that of Lucy and her child, and be fatal to them all.

And, as she reflected upon these dangers, and through the thin partition that divided the rooms, could hear that her mistress was tossing uneasily in her bed, evidently as sleepless as herself, she trembled for the effect that all this dreadful excitement might produce upon her. Would her reason stand firm ? or, if it did, would her health pass uninjured through such fearful trials ?

One thing was clear to her ; they must leave Florence immediately, at whatever risk, at whatever cost, and she was thankful indeed to know that she possessed the means that would enable them to undertake the journey, if they could escape secretly. She thought of Geneva ; but she remembered that the Marchese Monti would have received his sister's letter, and quitted the place long before they could hope to reach it. England, then, must be their destination, for nowhere in Italy would either she or Lucy feel any sense of security ; and she resolved to persuade the

Marchesa to fly with her and Francisco to Leghorn, and embark for Marseilles without loss of time. She possessed a trusty friend who would aid her in procuring passports; and, desperate as the plan seemed to be, she believed it was their only resource. For, in her own mind, she had not much hope that Lucy's reason had permanently returned to her: there had been a wandering expression in her eye, a hurried nervousness in her manner, the night before, which had not escaped the observation of Maria, and forbade her being very sanguine as to the result.

She left her bed at an early hour the next morning, despatched the maid with a message to her two young work-women, to the effect that they might take a holiday until they heard again from her; and went to the door of the Marchesa's apartment. She received no answer to her gentle tap; so she stole softly in. Lucy had at length fallen asleep; but her slumber was neither deep nor tranquil. She was tossing about, and muttering unintelligible words; and in a few seconds she opened her eyes, and started up in her bed, staring wildly about her. The welcome and soothing sight of her favourite Maria, however, soon recalled her to herself, and she held out her hand to Mademoiselle Salvi, who was shocked to find that it was burning hot. But Madame Monti persisted in declaring that she was quite well, and not in the least feverish—only a little overdone; and added that she was tired of lying in bed, and must get up directly. When she came down to breakfast, she looked and seemed so much revived, that Maria felt considerably relieved; for she had been alarmed, not only on account of Lucy's health, but also because any delay would probably have been fatal to the success of her scheme.

Mademoiselle Salvi had had some trouble in rousing Francisco; but, now that he was dressed, he appeared quite rested and as fresh as a lark, and made an excellent breakfast. His mother's appetite, too, had greatly improved; so that, as soon as the repast was finished, Maria ventured to communicate her plan to Madame Monti, and asked her opinion of it. She perfectly agreed that there was no security for them in Florence, and that the sooner they were out of it the better. Maria hastily made what preparations she could on so short a notice; and, before twelve o'clock, her friend had placed them in a comfortable vehicle, and

seen them leave Florence by the way on which they were least likely to meet with any obstacle to their progress. Maria had taken care to supply herself with ample funds for the journey, and all incidental expenses arising from it; and, in the event of their escaping safely to England, her friend had promised her that he would dispose of her business as profitably as he could, and forward her little income to her regularly, as she should hereafter direct.

The fugitives reached Leghorn without encountering any danger; but it was too evident to her watchful attendant, that Lucy's hand was hourly becoming hotter, her pulse more rapid, and her face more flushed—in short, that she had every indication of approaching fever.

Maria avoided the crowded hotels, where there would have been more chance of their being sought for; and repaired to a small inn, in a quiet and remote part of the town. They were fortunate in finding the house tolerably clean and comfortable, and the people all attention and civility. They all three travelled under the assumed name of Morgat; and the first lesson Francisco received in the art of deceit from his calumniated *bonne*, was her instructing him to call himself Adolphe Morgat, should any one ask him his name.

A steam-vessel was to start in the course of a few hours, bound for Marseilles, but Madame Monti was now too ill to attempt any further concealment; and, to add to her distress at being the innocent cause of detaining her boy where he was liable to be carried off, and placed once more in the power of his aunt, she was afraid to allow Maria to send for a medical man, who might discover and betray their secret. But Lucy grew rapidly worse. So long as she retained her consciousness, she resolutely refused to consent to Mademoiselle Salvi's entreaties, that she would have advice; but she was beginning to display unequivocal signs of delirium, and Maria, alarmed beyond measure, instantly called in a French physician, by name Monsieur Bertot. He pronounced it a case of brain fever, and shook his head when he heard how long his patient had been ill without consulting any one.

Maria was nearly distracted when she saw the unfavourable opinion which the doctor had conceived of the Marchesa's state; she felt that she ought to have insisted on disobeying her. But she had acted for the best, and in

ignorance of the dangerous nature of the attack with which Lucy had been threatened. Poor Francisco was very good and patient, and did his best in assisting to nurse his mother ; but he could not help wishing he might run down to the seashore, and amuse himself by watching the arrival and departure of the numerous vessels, and could not understand why he was not allowed to go beyond the dull confined bit of ground belonging to the inn.

And now Maria was placed in an unforeseen dilemma by the increasing delirium of Lucy, which became so fearfully violent, that it not only obliged her to hire a regular nurse to assist in the care of Madame Monti, but also caused her to disclose to Monsieur Bertot much of what they were most anxious to conceal. He speedily gathered from her ravings that there was some mystery attached to this trio ; and, being naturally of a very curious disposition, he was resolved to unravel the whole. Before Lucy became light-headed, she had exacted a solemn promise from Maria, that, should her illness deprive her for a time of her recovered reason, she would consider Francisco's safety before any thing else ; and that should Maria hear of the arrival of Mademoiselle Monti, or any one employed by her, at Leghorn, she would instantly escape with her charge. In an unguarded moment, when she had not thought there was any chance of her being called upon to keep it, Maria had made this promise, with a view of pacifying and soothing the unhappy mother, who had been in a state of fearful agitation for some hours before claiming it.

Monsieur Bertot was not long in gleaning so much of the Marchesa's story as sufficed to give him a very clear idea that she was escaping with her child from their lawful protector, and that Mademoiselle Salvi was aiding and abetting her in the attempt. The next day, he was sent for to attend a gentleman who had just come from Florence, and was taken ill on his homeward road. This gentleman, Monsieur d'Alger, mentioned to him, among other pieces of Florentine intelligence, that the city was covered with placards, offering a large reward for the apprehension of a lady and a little boy (the former labouring under insanity, however skilfully she might conceal it), who had escaped at midnight from their home, and were wandering, no one knew whither, leaving their family and friends in a state bordering on

distraction. Monsieur Bertot asked whether any description was given on the placard, whereby the fugitives might be identified. Monsieur d'Alger answered that the lady was an Englishwoman, married to an Italian; that the child spoke only the latter tongue, and that both were described as striking in their appearance. He added, that he was a stranger to Florence, and knew nothing of its inhabitants; but he had heard it rumoured that the parties in question were the wife and son of the representative of one of its oldest families; and that there was a mystery hanging over the whole affair, which was exciting much curiosity and interest.

Monsieur Bertot was silent for a time. He had no doubt in his own mind that his patient was the runaway lady; but he felt almost certain that she had not been insane, and that her ravings were the temporary result of the fever which was devouring her. His own impression was, that she was flying from tyranny and oppression, and endeavouring to rescue her son from the like treatment, and for a few minutes he hesitated whether he should betray the secret with which she had involuntarily intrusted him. But Monsieur Bertot was a man who would have scorned to allow any unselfish consideration to interfere with his own advantage or advancement, even had the case been one in which the path of duty was far more clearly pointed out to him than it was in this; and, reproaching himself with his short-lived infirmity of purpose, he told Monsieur d'Alger that he believed the lady was now under his care, and was lying dangerously ill of brain fever at the — Hotel; and he asked if Monsieur d'Alger could recall the address of the party to whom reference was to be made.

Monsieur d'Alger could not remember any thing at all about it, but thought perhaps his valet might know. The latter, on being questioned, however, professed entire ignorance of the whole business, for reasons best known to himself. He even strenuously denied having seen any such placards as those described by his master, and persevered in what he considered "a white lie," notwithstanding Monsieur d'Alger's repeated commands and threats. The fact was, that the man happened to be a brother of the very Gabrielle who had been denounced by Mademoiselle Monti, and who, in case of suspicion arising, was to have borne the odium of having been the first to receive the poisoned draughts from

the chemist's boy. Gabrielle knew that her mistress had been recovering, and was most warmly interested in the success of her escape ; though none but Adèle was alive to the full extent of the danger which she and the little boy would have incurred by remaining with Mademoiselle Monti ; and Monsieur d'Alger's valet had promised his sister, that he would preserve entire silence, should he by any chance fall in with the fugitives, or hear any thing which could afford a clue to their movements.

But Monsieur Bertot was not to be quite so easily foiled ; and he resolved to write that day, directing his letter to the post-office, to be instantly delivered to the friends of the missing lady. He knew that he could not accept of the offered reward ; but he believed that the noble and wealthy family to which Lucy was reported to belong, would not lose sight of his interest, after his rendering them so important a service : and, at all events, it would cause him to be talked about, and make his name more widely known.

After writing and despatching this letter, he went to visit his patient, whom he found so decidedly worse as almost to preclude any rational hope of her recovery. He told Maria, however, that she was much the same ; as he feared that, by alarming her with the apprehension of Lucy's speedy death, she might feel herself compelled to write to the lady's relatives, and he had no wish to forfeit his own prior claim to the merit of having done so. But Mademoiselle Salvi could scarcely bring herself to credit fully the doctor's assertion, that he found his patient in the same state in which he had left her the day before ; though it was difficult to imagine what motive he could have in deceiving her, when she spoke to him so calmly, and entreated him to tell her the exact truth, as it was of the utmost importance that she should know it. Strange to say, it had never once occurred to her that Monsieur Bertot would take any notice of Madame Monti's delirious ravings ; but she had carefully kept Francisco out of his way, more from an undefined feeling that it would be safer to do so, than from the dread of any actual danger arising from his being present at the doctor's visits. She was, therefore, considerably startled when Monsieur Bertot, after parrying her anxious inquiries as well as he could, asked after the little boy, and said he should like to see him. He did not appear to observe the flush that came

and went upon Maria's cheek, as she answered, in a confused manner, that she believed he was out; but, merely replying that he hoped he should have the pleasure of being introduced to the young gentleman another day, and that he would send the lady some more medicine, he took his leave.

We must return to Mademoiselle Monti and Adèle. The former had taken good care that her letter to her brother should not reach him for many days after the proper time; or rather she had delayed sending it at all, until it should be no longer in her power to avoid despatching what she intended to call her *second* letter. She earnestly hoped to capture the fugitives before he should receive the intelligence of their escape; for it was very important to her views—perhaps, now, even to her own security—that she should ascertain Lucy's real state of mind before allowing her to see her husband again, and take her own measures accordingly.

But she was beginning to despair. Eight days had passed away; and the united ingenuity of herself and Adèle, joined to the most persevering efforts on the part of those she employed, had failed in discovering the least indication of the track taken by Lucy and her son. Now and then a demon's hope possessed Mademoiselle Monti, that they would be found some day in the shape of lifeless skeletons or drowned corpses; but this was too vague and uncertain for her to reckon upon, and was contrary to the real belief with which she was impressed.

On the morning of the eighth day, however, Adèle came in from one of her perambulations, and told her mistress that it had not been altogether fruitless.

"Speak! speak!" gasped, rather than said, Francesca; "Adèle, I implore—I command you to be quick!"

But Adèle was in a tantalizing humour, and the word "*command*" had not escaped her.

"Really, Mademoiselle," she returned poutingly, "you quite flurry one with your vehemence! I shall be afraid of mentioning any thing to you, if you do not *command yourself* better! You will be sure to betray us before you have done, if you are not more careful."

Mademoiselle Monti swallowed her anger for the time, and even humbled herself to say, that she was sorry she had spoken impatiently to Adèle, who served her so faithfully, and begged her not to delay telling her the news.

"Maria Salvi has been living in the Strada —— until about a week ago" (Francesca's eyes gleamed with delight). "But she then left it quite suddenly, saying it was uncertain when she should return, and no one knows where she is gone. I came in to tell you this, because I thought you would be so glad to hear it; and now I am going out again directly to make further inquiries."

"Bless you, Adèle!" ejaculated Mademoiselle Monti, fervently; "you are worth your weight in gold!"

"And will be some day, in some more substantial way than words, or my name is not Adèle," thought the girl.

As she was preparing to leave the room, another servant met her at the door (they were staying at the Casa Monti), and put into her hands two letters for Mademoiselle Monti. The one which really concerned the young lady most she put carelessly aside, without even looking at the address, and hastened to open the other, which was from the Marchese. But Adèle had read the direction on Monsieur Bertot's despatch; and, with a quiet smile, she waited while Francesca perused her brother's voluminous epistle. She knew that she was provoking her mistress by this delay; but she knew also that Mademoiselle Monti would not dare to scold her for it, and she was pleased to have her revenge for the hasty, imperious way in which she had been addressed that morning.

"Excellent news from my brother, Adèle," said Francesca, in as bland a tone as her irritated feelings would allow her to assume. "I will tell you what he says when you come in again; but I hope first you will have something of more importance to tell me."

"Your other letter has fallen from your lap, Mademoiselle; let me put it in your envelope-case for you, till you are at leisure to attend to indifferent matters."

"No, thank you, Adèle! I will just look at it at once," answered Francesca, as the girl was about to do what she had proposed; "but I daresay it is of no consequence."

Adèle gave it to her with the seal upwards, so that she never looked at the direction before breaking it; and the delightful intelligence flashed upon her as a complete surprise. The effect it had upon her startled even the imperturbable Adèle. She was wild and intoxicated with the joy which really seemed to madden her; and, renouncing all attempt

at self-control, she rose from her chair and danced round the room in an ecstasy of glee, which, had her companion been a person of reading and education, might have reminded her of the dreadful dance of death, said to be performed, amid yells of exultation, by a certain race of savages around the fire that is consuming their wretched victim.

Without ceremony, Adèle possessed herself of the letter which Francesca had thrown upon the table. It is needless to say that it was from Monsieur Bertot, and the substance of it is already known to the reader.

"This explains Maria Salvi's sudden disappearance," remarked Adèle as she laid it down, intending the observation to be taken as a hint that she still expected a special fee for her exertions that morning, though their usefulness was now cancelled.

Francesca had by this time regained her composure ; and, fully understanding what Adèle was aiming at, she at once placed a handsome sum of money in her hands, and bade her prepare with all possible expedition for their immediate departure for Leghorn.

CHAPTER XIX.

LUCY was to all appearance in the last agonies of death ; and Maria was leaning over her, and repressing her own emotion, while she did all in her power to assuage the bitterness of that awful moment which seemed to be so rapidly approaching. Awful even to the best and holiest, and perhaps most of all to them, is the anticipation of that hour ; but more especially was it so to Lucy, who, in a lucid interval, implored her friend not to allow her life to pass away from her without spiritual aid and consolation, and then as suddenly remembered, that she had become a voluntary alien from the Church of her fathers, and that she dared not receive from the hands of the English clergyman that last solemn rite, for which she longed so earnestly. Maria, zealous in the faith of her own Church, besought her to see a Romish priest ; but the Marchesa at first shrank from the idea with a repugnance she could scarcely conceal from herself. She was doing her utmost to overcome this feeling, and to reconcile her heart and reason to the notion of receiving entire absolution from a minister of that creed in which her husband had lived, and in which her child was to be educated, when the door was opened by the nurse.

She entered with little Francisco, who immediately climbed upon the bed, and threw his arms around his mother's neck. She returned his caresses as far as her failing strength would allow ; and, meanwhile, the nurse whispered something to Maria, which had the effect of eliciting a faint shriek from the latter. Faint as it was, Lucy heard it, and immediately guessing that it could be no trifling or unimportant announcement that had surprised her friend into uttering it, she raised herself in bed, and insisted on knowing if any one had arrived. The silence which followed her question was in

itself a sufficient answer to it; and, as the nurse hastily quitted the room, she called Maria to her side, and in a low, but firm and composed voice, said—

“Maria, I now claim the fulfilment of your promise. Not a moment is to be lost. I know that Francesca is in the house; I feel that I shall not be alive at this hour to-morrow. Every thing you require is close at hand; and there may yet be time for you and Francisco to escape by the back way through the garden, and thence to the harbour by the way you were speaking of a few days ago to the nurse, when you little thought that I heard or understood you. Monsieur Bertot said, not two hours since, that he believed my time to be close at hand; you cannot save my life by remaining here, and, by so doing, you will allow my boy to fall again into *her* hands. Farewell, my faithful friend! God will reward you, though I cannot. Francisco, one last kiss—the Father of the fatherless will protect and bless my orphan child!”

Her voice failed her, and she sank back on her pillow; but by mute signs she implored, and even seemed to command, them instantly to leave her. Francisco, gathering from his confused understanding of his mamma's words, that she had at last consented to his going to the seashore, clung to Mademoiselle Salvi in an ecstasy of childish delight, and urged her to go with him directly. Maria stood for a moment irresolute. It was true that Monsieur Bertot no longer having any motive for concealment, had rather magnified than understated the real extent and urgency of the dangerous condition to which his patient was reduced, and had given it as his decided opinion that there was scarcely a chance of his finding her alive the next day. It was also true, that the dark valley of the shadow of death would seem brighter to poor Madame Monti, even in her utter desolation, if it were cheered by a ray of hope for her child.

All this passed through Mademoiselle Salvi's mind with the speed of lightning, and then her resolution was taken. One last embrace, in which was concentrated the deep and yearning affection of years, did Lucy bestow upon her son as Maria lifted him upon the bed; and she kissed her friend, and blessed her fervently, though without uttering another word—and they were gone, and she was left alone!

The nurse, perceiving the agitation of Maria at her sudden announcement of the arrival of a lady who declared herself to be the Marchesa's sister, and wished to see her with as little delay as possible, had gone down-stairs again, and had skilfully contrived to keep Mademoiselle Monti talking with her for some minutes. The young lady, believing herself secure of her victims, had been glad of the opportunity of asking a few questions concerning them before she inflicted her unwelcome presence upon them.

And now we will follow Maria, who, with Francisco in one hand, and a small bundle of actual necessities in the other, was rapidly making her way to the seashore. Most fortunately, one of the Marseilles steam-vessels was on the very point of starting; and they had but just time to get on board before the paddle-wheels were put in motion.

Poor Maria's heart sank within her as they bounded joyously along over the waves of the blue Mediterranean. She gazed upon the town, rapidly fading from their view; and her conscience smote her, as though she had done a wicked and unblessed thing, in leaving that fair and gentle creature to breathe her last in the presence of her deadly foe, and to struggle alone with the anguish which she felt was still between her and the peace and repose of the grave. She had no words to answer all Francisco's questions and exclamations of delight; and her deep sadness was at length apparent even to the excited child, who caught the infection, and, suddenly bursting into tears, asked why they were leaving his mamma when she was so ill, instead of waiting till she was well enough to go with them. Maria took him on her knee, without attempting to answer him but by sobs and caresses.

His evident distress attracted the notice of some of the passengers; and one or two of them spoke kindly to her, and inquired if they could in any way assist or comfort her. She saw the necessity of subduing all further manifestation of her feelings, lest she should give rise to questions which, unsatisfactorily replied to, might excite suspicion in the minds of her fellow-voyagers. So she dried her own eyes and those of Francisco; and, courteously thanking the passengers who had addressed her, she said that she and the child had both been weeping at parting from one very dear to them, but that she did not stand in need of any aid,

pecuniary or otherwise. She succeeded in calming the boy, who was soon restored to his former state of pleasure at the novelty of all around him ; but Maria kept him closer to her than was quite agreeable to him, fearing lest he should enter into conversation with any one on board, who might be tempted to make friends with so fine and prepossessing a child.

They had a swift passage to Marseilles, whence Maria and Francisco hastened on to Paris. Here they were compelled to pause, as both were nearly worn out, and the little boy was complaining of headache, and other uncomfortable sensations. Maria had changed their assumed name of Morgat for that of Bioletti, because the former one had of course become known to Mademoiselle Monti ; and she could only hope and pray that their obscure retreat, in the neighbourhood of the Chaillot, might remain undiscovered. The child soon rallied, however ; and Maria, having arranged about their passports, they left Paris without having experienced any alarm of detection there, and reached London in perfect safety.

Mademoiselle Salvi had meditated, as far as meditation had been possible during their hurried journey, on the course she should adopt on their arrival in England. She had naturally thought of Mrs. Protheroe, of whose selfish and indiscreet character she was not fully aware. But, luckily, she had been made partially so by a few hasty and inadvertent words that had once fallen from the lips of Lucy while still possessed of her reason ; and Mrs. Protheroe's refusal to visit her daughter after the loss of it, which Francesca had been careful to promulgate, had still further opened Maria's eyes to the truth.

She felt sorely puzzled when, on disembarking with Francisco at London Bridge, and getting into a cab, the man asked her where he was to drive them ? Her ignorance of the English language, and the absence of a single friend in a strange land, came across her suddenly with overwhelming power ; and giving way for the first time to a sense of their desolate position, instead of answering the man's question, she burst into tears. The driver was a good-natured sort of fellow, who did not like to see a woman cry ; and though her being a foreigner was not a little against her in his eyes, yet he did his utmost to console her, by assuring her that he would not cheat her, but would drive her wherever she

pleased, as fast as one of the best horses in London could take them along. His words were of course quite unintelligible to her ; but she gathered from his manner, and from the expression of his countenance, that he meant to be civil ; and with the aid of a bystander, who was quicker at interpreting signs than the cabman, she at length made them comprehend that she wished to be driven to some house where French was spoken. The man who had come forward to her assistance had a brother who let lodgings, and this brother had lately married a Frenchwoman ; and to their abode in — Street he directed the cabman to drive.

Most happy was this occurrence for the fugitives. Mr. and Mrs. Kidd received them with kindness, the latter having something of a fellow-feeling for Mademoiselle Salvi, who, though not a countrywoman, was, like herself, a foreigner in a strange land. Maria was too discreet to confide to them at once the whole history of herself and her boy, who, since the time of their quitting Leghorn, had been told by her to call her mother. But she felt the necessity of opening her heart to a fellow-creature, and asking the advice of one accustomed to English habits and manners, who could tell her what course it would be best to pursue in the attainment of her two principal objects—secrecy and economy. And she soon saw that she could have no better confidants than Mr. Kidd and his wife, on whose silence and judgment she could implicitly rely.

She remained with them for about two months ; and during that time she communicated with her Florentine friend, who had disposed of her business for her more profitably than she could have hoped ; and she found, after consulting with Mr. Kidd, that the money thus acquired, with the remnant yet untouched of her little property, would enable her to rent a cottage of him in the retired country village of which her landlord was a native. This village was Leyton, and the cottage was the one inhabited by Mademoiselle Salvi and Francisco Monti when first we made their acquaintance.

I need hardly say that Maria had not been unmindful of the fate of her unhappy mistress ; and bitter and unceasing were her self-reproaches for her desertion of her. Before quitting London, she learned from her friend's letters that Mademoiselle Monti had returned to Florence in deep

mourning, accompanied only by her servant; and that the sad death of the Marchesa Monti at Leghorn was generally spoken of and lamented in her own city. Maria had not dared to hope for any other intelligence; and, indeed, had tried to reason herself into the belief that it was far happier for her mistress to die than to fall again into the hands of a sister-in-law, who, in addition to her former hatred, would now be infuriated by rage and mortification. Yet the news of Lucy's death was a shock, and a heartfelt grief to her faithful attendant, notwithstanding all her previous efforts to reconcile herself to the idea of it. So young, so beautiful, and once so bright and joyous as the Marchesa had been; who could think without emotion of her dying far away from all she loved, and with no hand to smooth her pillow but that of her merciless foe? In Maria's eyes she was as perfect as any human being could be; for Lucy's early errors were all unknown to her.

At the end of these two months Maria and Francisco repaired to Leyton; and Mr. and Mrs. Kidd took a holiday and accompanied them, in order to see them comfortably installed in their new home. Mr. Kidd was also glad of the opportunity the trip afforded him, of revisiting his native village and introducing his young wife to his old friends. He was doing tolerably well in the world; and he had built this cottage with a view of ending his days where they had begun, intending in the mean time to let it, if possible. In consideration of Maria being likely to prove a good tenant, and also of her scanty means, he had offered her the cottage at a lower rent than he might probably have obtained for it; and this Maria had suspected, though he had been too generous to tell her so.

And now let us recur for a few minutes to the Marchese Monti. I have already explained that his sister had taken care that the dreadful intelligence she had to communicate, of the flight of his wife and son, should not reach him too soon for her purposes. In the meanwhile, he and Mr. Deloraine had quitted Geneva for a fortnight, intending to explore the neighbouring country; and, when he found himself again at Geneva, his first anxious question was for any letters that might have arrived for him at the hotel during his absence. One, directed in Francesca's handwriting, was given to him. He opened it, and read as follows—

"MY DEAREST FABIO,—Being fearful that my first letter never can have reached you, I resolve to write once more. Prepare yourself for the worst, my brother! Hitherto I have discovered no traces of our beloved Lucia and Francisco. Heaven only knows where they can have taken refuge: the united exertions of myself, Adèle, and Filippo, by day and by night, in every possible and almost impossible quarter, have failed—utterly failed! Fly to me, my brother, for my heart is sinking within me! While the slightest hope remained, I was strong; but now that hope has fled, I am weak and powerless as a child! Yet do not for one moment imagine that I will relax my efforts, until you yourself shall have pronounced them useless. But come without delay, and join your's to mine; for possibly success may be granted to your superior skill and knowledge. I can say no more—Your loving and heart-broken sister,

"FRANCESCA MONTI."

I need not dwell on poor Fabio's feelings when he read this note; nor need I add, that he instantly set off to Florence, and travelled with the utmost expedition. His faithful friend, Mr. Deloraine, insisted on accompanying him, and assisting him in his search after the fugitives. But they only reached Florence just in time to meet Francesca and Adèle on their arrival there from Leghorn. Mademoiselle Monti's face at once assured her brother that she had no good news to communicate, but he was quite unprepared for the announcement of his wife's death. On this occasion, however, perhaps from the very depth of his grief, he did not lose his outward composure, and in a quiet, steady voice, he begged to be informed of all particulars; and the trio sat down in the drawing-room of the Casa Monti, while Francesca related her not unpremeditated tale.

My readers are already acquainted with a version of it, more strictly true than her's, until the time of Mademoiselle Monti's appearance at Leghorn; from that period we will repeat her own words—

"When I discovered that our Lucia was on her deathbed, and that the attendant, who had pretended so deep an affection for her mistress, had deserted her in such an hour, and carried off your little treasure, my grief for the moment was almost swallowed up in my indignation. But when I

rushed up-stairs to my sister's room, and saw her—but I will not lacerate your feelings, my dearest Fabio, by any minute description of what I beheld. Suffice it to say, that she lingered for a day and night ere she breathed her last."

"Thank God, you were with her, my sister!" murmured Fabio; "even in this bitter hour, that knowledge is not without its consolation."

She replied by taking his hand, and pressing it to her lips, and proceeded thus—

"Circumstances too painful to dwell upon rendered it imperatively necessary to bury the Marchesa as quickly as possible; so that I had the additional pang of being prevented from conveying her where she might repose by our parents' side. I consulted Monsieur Bertot, of whose kindness and skill I can never speak too highly; and, being compelled to decide at once, I resolved that the remains of our darling should be laid at ——, a quiet and secluded spot about five miles from Leghorn."

Mademoiselle Monti was here interrupted by the excess of her emotion, and indulged in a passion of tears and lamentations. Indeed, she had little more to tell, as far as her story of Lucy was concerned; and, for a time, the husband was so completely engrossed by the thought of his wife, that even Francisco was forgotten. But his aunt resumed—

"My first inquiry was for Lucia; my next for your son. The nurse whom Maria Salvi had engaged to attend on her mistress, was churlish and ill-behaved, and not disposed to be communicative; but I succeeded in ascertaining from her, and from a very uncivil landlord, that the little boy and his attendant had quitted the house but a few hours before, with the intention, as they believed, of embarking on board a steam-vessel; but of their destination they professed entire ignorance. I immediately sent Adèle to the place of embarkation to make every inquiry, but without gaining any certain information. My own opinion is, either that Maria Salvi has fled to England, or will remain in France for a time, with the intention of returning to Italy when she fancies that the search is over, and our suspicions are lulled. But I know not," she added, assuming an air of great meekness; "this sad and heart-rending business is now in wiser and more able hands than mine. My part is done."

As soon as Mademoiselle Monti had quite ended her

narration, Mr. Deloraine rose and left the room. He and Francesca had never met before except at the ball ; and she had always been represented to him by her brother as the best of women and of sisters. It was strange, then (at least, so it appeared to him, who knew not that others had resembled him in this), that he should have conceived a prejudice against her, even in the course of that hour's interview. More than once he had longed to interrupt her in the course of her story, to ask some questions that occurred to him in connection with what she was relating ; but he had suppressed the wish, and heard her out in silence to the end.

While he left the brother and sister to the more unrestrained intercourse of a *tête-à-tête*, he walked up and down pondering on the impression made on him by Francesca, and on what he could best do to aid his friend in regaining his lost child. With regard to the young lady, he could hardly repress a smile as he recalled the wish which the Marchese had one evening confided to him in an unguarded moment—namely, that Mr. Deloraine should become the husband of his sister. But his mind was little disposed to dwell on such trifling thoughts as these. His own idea, so strong as to amount almost to a conviction, was, that Mademoiselle Salvi had taken the boy to England. He did not think it likely that, if she were a woman of any acuteness or discernment, she would deem herself secure in returning to Florence, not after the lapse of months, or even years. And when the Marchese Monti rejoined him, he was glad to find that, on the whole, he and Mademoiselle were of the same opinion. At least, so the latter pretended ; but she had her own reasons for wishing Fabio to go to England, while she pursued the search nearer home. She knew that the Marchese's heart was in the work ; and that, if the united exertions of himself and Mr. Deloraine failed in discovering the child, there was no chance of her forwarding matters by accompanying them to England. She only begged them to avoid the inn where the Marchesa Monti had been treated with so little civility and attention on her deathbed ; and bade them farewell with many tears, and, she declared, with fervent prayers for their success, which she certainly desired with more ardour, and awaited with more anxiety, than any other event in this world.

And to England they went ; Mr. Deloraine to Dover, the

Marchese straight to London. But here all his efforts were unavailing; and for more than two months the friends sought in vain. They not only instituted every possible inquiry in London; but, on the slightest supposed clue being given them, one of them instantly went to the suspected place, and hunted in every corner of it.

At length, they were beginning to despair of effecting any good by remaining longer in England, when the Marchese, in returning to town from one of these fruitless expeditions, was met by Mr. Deloraine, who told him that he could not but hope he had just been made acquainted with the real spot where his boy was to be found.

Mr. Deloraine had been standing close to the place of disembarkation for the boats from Boulogne, and talking to a man who had been employed by the Marchese to assist them in their search. This person was saying—

"I fully described the young woman and the little gentleman, sir. I said that neither of them could speak English, and that they were supposed to have arrived from France more than two months ago;"—when a cabman, near at hand, in the hope of securing a fare in Mr. Deloraine, stepped forward, and said—

"I humbly beg your pardon, sir; but, rather better than two months back, I drove a young lady and a little boy from here to — Street. They was both foreigners, sir, as couldn't speak scarce a word of English."

Mr. Deloraine made further inquiries, and thinking it just possible that the cabman's story might lead to something, he stepped into his informant's vehicle, and drove to Mr. Kidd's. Here the servant-girl was at first quite obdurate, absolutely refusing to say more than that her master and mistress were not at home, and she knew nothing about any foreigners. She had been especially desired by Mr. and Mrs. Kidd not to gratify any idle curiosity on the subject; and this was the reason of her thus answering Mr. Deloraine, but she was not proof against the seductions of a couple of guineas, which he thrust into her unresisting hand; and she confessed that Mr. and Mrs. Kidd, accompanied by Madame Bioletti and her little boy, had gone off not many days ago by the coach, but that she was really ignorant of the exact place of their destination. She added, however, that she should not be surprised if they had gone somewhere near — (mention-

ing the country town), as she knew that master's village was not far off.

On this information Mr. Deloraine and the Marchese immediately acted; and, after exploring the different neighbouring villages, the Marchese, as we have seen, discovered his child's retreat, and claimed him as his son.

My father's consent to our marriage on the —th of November was joyfully given; and it was arranged that I should

society.—‘But your own handwriting, Augusta!’ I said, producing the note, of which I may not repeat the contents; ‘can you deny that?’—‘Really, Laura,’ she answered, in an offended and haughty manner, ‘I cannot acknowledge the right of a young girl like you to call me to account. And, indeed, as you assure me that you have only read the first few words of that note, and were surprised into reading those, how can you tell that the conclusion may not explain and justify the commencement?’ And, changing her tone, she added, coaxingly, ‘Come, you dear silly child, give me a kiss, and let us think no more of all this folly and treachery. You must forgive my momentary anger; but it *was* very hard to be suspected by my own dear Laura, on the word of one of whom she knew nothing—was it not? But Edward is waiting for me—I must be off!’ She had been putting on her bonnet and shawl during our conversation, and she hastily left me without giving me time to utter another word. And now, what am I to do? I am so tongue-tied about this note; and, were I not, how could I break my brother’s heart by telling him all I know, or rather fear?”

“Dear Laura, I think you must be silent,” I answered; and I repeated to her the substance of the conversation I had had that morning with Arthur. She listened with great attention; and she agreed with me that matters must be allowed to take their course, and that we could only hope for the best. Perhaps my advice to Laura on this subject was not altogether unbiassed by my earnest, though untold, desire, that Miss Sutherland should be married, and married as speedily as possible. But, however that may have been, my young companion was gifted with too much decision of character to have acted on any opinion of mine, had it not been confirmed by her own.

Arthur now re-entered; and Laura, immediately divining that he wished to speak to me alone, left us. He told me that he had been with Lord Tintern, whose wedding was just fixed for the —th of November, and who had expressed a great desire to be married on the same day with ourselves. Arthur added, that the proposal was one which gave him great pleasure; and I had no objection to make to it, and indeed was not a little pleased at the prospect of thus escaping from the office, now so odious to me, of being Augusta’s bridesmaid.

"I only hope Miss Sutherland will not faint in the church, from the emotion she must feel at seeing you bound to another," I said with a bitter laugh.

"Hush! hush!" said Arthur; "henceforth not a breath of such things must pass our lips; and surely, my dear, dear Caroline, this is not a moment for words of aught but happiness and love?" He drew me to him as he spoke; and when I looked up at him, and saw the expression of those eloquent eyes fixed upon my face, I asked myself how I could for one instant admit a doubt of his affection for me? And indeed in that hour I felt too supremely blest to nourish animosity, even against my rival, as I persisted in considering Augusta.

Surely there is something in excess of happiness, which for the time, scarcely less than sorrow, exercises a softening power over our hearts, and disposes us to wish that others should share our joy. In my present frame of mind I felt, and expressed to Arthur, how rejoiced I should be if the same day that bound us to each other could also unite Agnes, with her own free-will and choice, to Henry Mordaunt, and that their bliss should equal ours. I could not have gratified Arthur more than by speaking kindly of Agnes; and he thanked me for this fresh proof of my love for him, and pressed me yet closer to him. And we spent half an hour in the enjoyment of that felicity which only affianced lovers feel—which no tongue can adequately tell, or pen describe.

And in another chamber close by, sat two, like ourselves, pledged to that holy and intimate union, instituted and hallowed by God himself. But, of those two, one only was uttering in truth and sincerity the vows of constancy and love—there, and at the altar, the other was but a dissembler and a hypocrite. Does the blessing of God rest on those who enter upon the married state without the intention of even trying to do their duty in it? My life, though short, has been long enough to enable me to answer this question from my own observation; it has been long enough, too, to show me, with the still more convincing power of experience, that not the most true and impassioned affection on both sides will by itself ensure happiness—that something, not of this world, is needed also.

My father's consent to our marriage on the —th of November was joyfully given; and it was arranged that I should

go to town the following week, when our festive party was to disperse, to procure my *trousseau*.

I pass over the few weeks that intervened until the dawning of that day which was to behold the celebration of two gay weddings at St. George's, Hanover square. Contrary to what, I believe, is the usual custom in the solemnization of a double union, Lord Tintern and Miss Sutherland were to be married first, and Arthur and myself immediately afterwards. I had just consideration enough for Agnes to wish to spare her the pang of being bridesmaid at the marriage of the man she had so dearly loved ; and Arthur thought, with me, that she would understand and appreciate my motive in not asking her to officiate in that capacity. But one morning, when we happened to be alone together after my visit to London, Agnes addressed me at the conclusion of a song I had been practising, and, to my surprise, requested to be allowed to be one of my bridesmaids.

" You will not have a more sincere well-wisher than myself, Caroline ; and, as your only cousin, I am sure you will not be offended at my asking a favour which is generally offered."

I suppose my countenance partly betrayed my astonishment, which was so great as to prevent my replying directly. Agnes went on, and, as she spoke, her pale cheek was slightly flushed—

" I know why you and—and—Captain Mildmay (it was still an effort to her to pronounce that name) have forbore to ask me, and I am truly grateful to you both for this mark of tender consideration for me ; but, my dear Caroline, I trust I have not struggled in vain against feelings which it would be a crime to indulge for the betrothed husband of another, and I am quite equal to—This is the last time I shall speak on the subject : henceforth let all things be as though they had never been otherwise ; but, my dear cousin, if that was your only objection to having me for one of your bridesmaids, I hope you will not deny me what I have so set my heart upon."

" Agnes, you are an angel !" was my involuntary exclamation, and I embraced her with a feeling of genuine affection and admiration. But Arthur came in from shooting ; and instead of first greeting me, whom he had not seen that morning, he turned to Agnes, and asked her in a quick, hurried manner if she was not very ill—struck, I suppose, by the

deadly pallor her cheeks had assumed. I left the room without speaking to him. The consequence was, that coldness arose between Arthur and myself, which lasted for some days, and that Agnes spent that time in sorrow and dejection, believing herself, though innocently, the cause of our estrangement. However, the renewal of love succeeded to the lovers' quarrel, the last we had before our marriage.

I did not again see Miss Sutherland or Lord Tintern, who were fully occupied with each other, and with their preparations for the approaching event; but I gleaned from the tone of Laura's letters, more than from any thing she actually said in them, that his happiness was not always unclouded, though his affection was undiminished. I fancied that Laura told Agnes more than she did me, in whom her first confidence had perhaps been rather unguardedly reposed in a moment of distress and agitation of mind.

My cousin was by nature reserved, and this disposition having been encouraged by the life she had led at Vernon Hall, it now amounted almost to a fault. I was strengthened in my opinion of Laura having chosen her for her confidante, by Agnes never even mentioning when she had received a letter from her friend; and, if I questioned her at all on these occasions, she always coloured and looked confused. More than once, two separate budgets arrived on the same morning, one for Agnes and one for me; and though Laura's letters to me were clever and amusing, and by no means wanting in regard, I could not but suspect that her secret thoughts and feelings were reserved for Agnes. Here was an additional source of annoyance and vexation. But mine, like all unchecked jealous tempers, has made my own misery through life, and that of all around me.

We must now return to Maria Salvi; and for this purpose must retrace our steps to the evening of the day of our interview. The discussion about our wedding had for the time completely effaced her sad story from my mind; so that, when the ladies quitted the dining-room, and the servant told me that Mademoiselle Salvi was waiting to speak with me, the promise I had given her of consulting with my father was still unfulfilled. It was too natural to me to consider myself and my own concerns first, for me to experience more than a momentary pang of self-reproach at having so entirely forgotten a fellow-creature in distress;

and, as Mr. Willis happened to be crossing the hall at that instant, I resolved to ask him to join me for a few minutes in my little room, and desired that Mademoiselle Salvia might be shown into another. It was no great friendship on my part for Mr. Willis, nor on his for me, that led me to beg for his opinion on the present occasion ; but I had confidence in his judgment, and was unwilling to excite curiosity among the gentlemen by sending for my father.

I began by giving him a hasty outline of Maria's story ; but when I mentioned the name of Monti, Mr. Willis started from his chair, his whole countenance working convulsively, and seizing my hand, he asked me, in tones of impassioned earnestness, if I knew aught of the Marchesa ? I was silent from astonishment, and from the dread of what effect the intelligence of her being no more might have upon him. It flashed across me like lightning—he then must be the English gentleman of whom Maria had heard Francesca speak, when alluding to Lucy's early days, with the intention of maligning her sister-in-law. But my face must have betrayed what my lips did not reveal ; for, as I spoke not, Mr. Willis relaxed his grasp, became perfectly calm, and uttering but one groan of anguish, which seemed to come forth from the depth of his heart, he said—

“ I understand—she is dead, and you are afraid to tell me so. But why should I grieve for her ? Yet, false, or rather fickle, as she was, I have never ceased to pray God for her happiness and welfare. Go on, Miss Vernon, and forgive a burst of feeling, of which I am not likely to be guilty again. I have had time enough to be cured of such weakness.”

I proceeded, and touched as lightly as I could upon the treatment the unhappy Lucy had received ; but I could see that even the softened details I was compelled to relate pierced him to the quick ; and I thought how little the Marchesa Monti had consulted her own true happiness in casting from her the affection of such a man. When I spoke of her boy, Mr. Willis was fearfully agitated, and I could perceive that every vein was throbbing from the violence of suppressed emotion. My tale being ended, I asked him if I was right in deeming that the child could not be detained from his father, as there was no possibility of convincing others that Maria's fears for his safety, if restored once more to the care of his aunt, were well-grounded ?

Mr. Willis agreed with me ; but said he should like to see Mademoiselle Salvi, and have some conversation with her.

She appeared in a state of frantic excitement, in which anger for the time predominated over grief, as she informed us, with many tears and imprecations, that the boy was gone ; that when she had returned home that morning, he was nowhere to be found ; and that the neighbours had told her he had gone away, apparently most gladly and willingly, with the tall, dark gentleman whom they had seen before in the neighbourhood of these cottages. Maria added that she had been wandering about for hours in all directions, in the vain hope of meeting with the Marchese and his son ; though certainly it would have been to little purpose had she succeeded in doing so.

Mr. Willis, now quite himself again, asked her many questions, and elucidated several particulars, concerning the Monti family, of which she had not informed me. He proceeded to tell her that he had formerly been a friend of her late mistress's family, and was much distressed to hear of her death under such sad and trying circumstances. He said that he feared there was no alternative, but that Mademoiselle Salvi must endeavour to resign herself to the loss of the child ; and he expressed his hope, and indeed his conviction, that her affection for him and his mother had led her to exaggerate the danger to which he would be exposed. He believed the worst that could happen to Francisco would be, his having to undergo a harsh and severe system of education, and even this he trusted would be guarded against by the love which she acknowledged that the father bore to his only child. But Maria shook her head at this ; however, as she was at that time quite unacquainted with the fell designs of Mademoiselle Monti and her maid Adèle against the boy's life, she could not disprove the justice of Mr. Willis's observations.

Mr. Willis added, that Mademoiselle Salvi should never want a friend while he lived ; and poor Maria, somewhat consoled by his words, and by the confidence with which he had already inspired her, withdrew, with many thanks to us both for our kindness to her in her sorrows.

When I was once more alone with Mr. Willis, he told me that he hoped I should consider as sacred the words which had been wrung from him in a moment of emotion, and that

I would not mention, except to Arthur, what had escaped him on the subject of his early attachment. I readily gave him the promise he asked for ; and on that night a feeling of mutual regard was established between us, which has never been obliterated. I should say, that he told me he had exchanged the name of Hartwell for the one he now bore, which my readers will probably have guessed long ago.

Mr. Willis passed the remainder of the evening in his own apartment ; and I observed that Emily Mordaunt glanced eagerly at the door each time it was opened, and that a shade of disappointment stole over her countenance when Mr. Willis did not appear. But he came down the next morning at his usual hour, and, as we sat at breakfast, no trace was discernible in him of the last night's occurrences. He was, I fancied, rather softened in manner ; and the change which had been gradually taking place in his style of talking, seemed to me to progress more rapidly, so that hours would elapse without his giving vent to any of those cynical or sarcastic remarks which formerly had been ever on his lips. And more and more he courted the society of Miss Mordaunt, and in his way was all attention to her. I pointed out to Arthur these signs of a new attachment springing up to take the place of the old one in his heart ; and Captain Mildmay thought as I did, and firmly hoped that much happiness was yet in store for the excellent Mr. Willis.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was a bright morning, though a November one, in London, that dawned upon our marriage day, and my heart beat with feelings of joy and happiness that had not a cloud to dim them; for Arthur had been all that the most *exigeante fiancée* could desire. Agnes had regained her former placid cheerfulness, and Miss Sutherland had been entirely engrossed by Lord Tintern. Around me I saw only smiling faces, or heard the sound of a merry laugh.

Our parties met at the Church door; and Augusta looked radiant in her exceeding beauty, as, attired in the richest of bridal costumes, her father handed her from the carriage, and led her up the aisle. Lord Tintern's thoughtful countenance was lighted by an expression of unmingled happiness, as he gazed with pride and fondness on his lovely bride. Even Lady Laura had apparently cast all dismal forebodings into the background, and was all spirits and gaiety, leaning on the arm of Henry Mordaunt. Most of the friends who have been already introduced to the reader, were assembled at the Church, or at the breakfast afterwards—with others whom (as they do not play a prominent part in this history) it would be useless to mention more particularly, Captain Spencer, as bridegroom's man to Arthur; Mr. Willis and Miss Mordaunt, as affianced lovers; Mr. Banks and Mrs. Fitzmaurice, as verging closely upon that condition; and Miss Bateman, looking pleased, though it was not an occasion on which she could hope to be the centre of attraction; but Lord Lowndes was by her side, and sufficiently attentive to her to turn her silly head with the notion that he was desperately in love with her.

Lord Tintern and Miss Sutherland were married first, and I watched them both during the performance of the

service. He went through it with real, and she with well-affected, earnestness and solemnity. But there was no display of emotion on her part, for her natural good taste forbade the exhibition; and perhaps the consciousness that the secret of her so recent attachment to Arthur was known to him, and not to him alone, made her deem it more prudent not to evince any strong symptoms of being overcome by the intensity of her affection for Lord Tintern. Be that as it might, her demeanour was by all declared to be perfect; and, as she passed down the aisle, leaning on the arm of her husband, no words could do more than justice to her grace and loveliness. Yet at that moment, when her marriage vow was still almost trembling on her lips, I saw her cast one glance at Arthur, which spoke volumes to me, and assured me that her love for him remained unconquered, if indeed she had made any effort at all to banish it from her heart. But my own happiness was too great that day to be disturbed by the conviction of Lady Tintern's unworthiness; and I only experienced a transient feeling of compassion for her husband, who was deserving of a better fate than to be tied to one thus systematically deceiving him.

In truth and sincerity did we pledge our mutual faith. A few hours later, we left London with the view of making a tour of some months in Italy. My mother parted with me most kindly; my father, with all the warmth of his devotion for his child, but yet, as he assured me, with only rejoicing at his heart. Agnes was cordial to us both; but when the time of our departure arrived, she could scarcely utter the farewells and good wishes which she really felt.

Lord and Lady Tintern went to Brighton—for so had she willed it, having no fancy for rural delights at that dull season of the year. Edward yielded, though it had been his anxious desire to convey his bride at once to her future home, a cheerful house, beautifully situated about thirty miles from his father's mansion.

The first two months of our wedded life were unclouded; and, as I look back upon them, I can hardly believe that I have tasted of such intense happiness only to forfeit it for ever. Yet I cannot accuse myself of not having prized it while it lasted; for I was fully conscious of the blessing I enjoyed in the possession of my husband's deep and sincere attachment. It was an unusually bright, mild winter; and

we rejoiced in the opportunity it afforded us of seeing to advantage the glories of that

“Land which still is Paradise !”

We visited Florence, Rome, Naples, and Venice, remaining abroad for six months.

I have mentioned two as the period during which our conjugal felicity was uninterrupted by even a breath of discord, or a shadow of misunderstanding. Our first difference had its origin in the following occurrence : As we were strolling leisurely one beautiful afternoon through the Cascine at Florence, we encountered a gentleman whom I immediately recognised as the mysterious stranger we had seen amid the ruins of —— Castle. His outward appearance was wholly metamorphosed by the difference in his dress and carriage, for now he was no longer in disguise ; but the indescribable something which rendered him so striking, at once convinced me of his identity with the man whose demeanour had so perplexed us on that occasion. From his countenance the traces of excitement had vanished, but a melancholy and care-worn expression had taken its place, and early furrows had been ploughed upon that still youthful forehead.

His hand held that of the little fellow whom I had seen with Maria Salvi at the cottage-gate at Leyton. Him, too, I knew instantly, though the change in the boy was greater than in the man ; not only had all life and animation forsaken that bright childish face, but he had become thin and pale, and looked as wearied in body as in mind. And, on the other side of the gentleman, her arm in his, was a lady, still young in years, though the contour of her face, and its extreme gravity, gave her the appearance of a woman considerably turned of thirty.

I had been convinced, on hearing Maria's tale, that the Marchese Monti was the stranger in disguise, who had displayed such uncontrollable emotion when unexpectedly confronted with Mr. Willis ; and now I was no less certain that the lady before me was the Mademoiselle Monti who had played so prominent a part in Mademoiselle Salvi's narration.

All this flashed across me in an instant ; and we had hardly passed the trio, before I exclaimed—“ Arthur ! those

are the Montis. Now is the time to warn the Marchese of the impending fate of his child!" But Arthur made no reply, though my excitement had caused me to speak rather more loudly than usual; and, in turning towards him, I saw that his eyes were intently fixed on a young lady with an extremely pretty face, who sat on a bench close to us, weeping bitterly.

"How comes such a beautiful young creature to be there by herself, and in such distress, I wonder?" murmured Arthur, as if soliloquizing.

"I think you had better listen to me when I speak," I remarked, half joking, half angry; "and, indeed, I should suppose the fate of that little boy and his poor mother was more deserving of your attention than the crying of a silly, unknown girl under a tree!"

"Perhaps I am not exactly of your opinion," was my husband's indignant rejoinder. "I am not a man to see a pretty girl in trouble without being sorry for her, and gladly would I do any thing I could to console her. And, my dear Caroline, it strikes me that you spoke rather loud, considering that we are walking in a public place; though really, I must own, I have not the least idea of what you were talking."

Arthur had scarcely uttered these words before he regretted his hastiness; but I was not to be so easily appeased. For a minute I was speechless with anger and astonishment, but I soon found voice to say—

"Very well, Captain Mildmay Vernon; as you please. You had better go at once, and inquire into the cause of that lady's troubles, and I will go about the business that interests me most nearly at present."

"And what is that, dear Caroline?" asked he kindly.

"I have already mentioned it," was my dignified reply; "and, as you 'had not the least idea of what I was talking,' I certainly shall not trouble myself to do so again."

At this answer, I saw the colour rise on Arthur's cheek, and his eye flash, and he turned short round, and began walking me rapidly towards home. As we repassed the lady on the bench, I observed that she had dried her eyes; but her mute expression of sorrow and anguish was even more touching to behold than her tears. However, I was in no mood to acknowledge any feeling of compassion for her,

and I said, sneeringly—"Had not you better see if you can be of any assistance to that forlorn damsel, Arthur? She is looking very kindly upon you, probably in gratitude for some tender glances she received from you before. Her tears, it seems, have already vanished beneath their influence."

"You had better be silent, Caroline!" said my husband, sternly; and, when I looked at him, I thought so too, and obeyed. For Arthur, like many good-tempered persons, was fierce in his anger, perhaps because he was not prone to exhaust it on trifling occasions. I knew that he was right; but the consciousness that I was wrong did not in my disposition produce the slightest wish of being conciliatory.

We had hardly left the bench behind us when the lady hastily quitted it, and ran, rather than walked, in the direction from which we were returning. A minute more, and we were again face to face with the Montis; and again did Arthur fail to recognize either father or son. Before we reached the Hotel —, at which we were staying, two gentlemen mounted on spirited horses approached us. One was Captain Spencer; the other, as I soon learned, was Mr. Deloraine, the Marchese Monti's friend, who was also known to Captain Spencer. I was the first to perceive him; and I exclaimed in a tone of great delight, by which I intended to revenge myself upon Arthur—

"There is Captain Spencer, I declare! How glad I am he is here! I had no notion of his being abroad. Well! I dare say he will have the kindness to escort his friend's wife occasionally, while that friend is playing the knight-errant to his fair *incognita*."

By this time Captain Spencer had reined in his horse, dismounted, and was standing before us with extended hand. I greeted him warmly, and so did Arthur, whose eyes were not yet opened to the real character of this man; but my husband could not at once shake off the gloom which my unkind words and behaviour had produced. Captain Spencer observed it directly, nor was my defiant air unnoticed by him; for he said, significantly—

"Really, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, it does a poor worn-out fellow like myself a world of good to see two such happy faces! I have just come from England, sick to death of men and women, and the whole round of pleasure and amusement,

and I hoped to find a little variety here ; but I hardly reckoned upon such luck as meeting you."

"You will come and dine with us to-day?" said Arthur, who was resolved not to be made angry. "We leave Florence to-morrow, so you must come."

"I wish I could," he replied *sotto voce* ; "but I cannot fight off an engagement to dine with Deloraine, and escort his sisters to some ball afterwards. They are rather pretty girls, but what do I care for that?"

Here he glanced at me ; and, in the excited state of my feelings, I was not angry, nor even indifferent to the avowal of continued admiration which that look conveyed ; but was rather pleased at it, thinking that it might give me an additional hold upon Arthur. The commonest good sense might have taught me how dangerous it is for a woman, who in her heart prizes her husband's love beyond all things, to trifle with it by endeavouring to excite his jealousy ; but it was the passion so predominant in myself, that I believed it must be the most effectual means of vanquishing another. Arthur, however, was at present very far from being jealous of Captain Spencer ; for he was not of a suspicious nature, and had too much confidence in his wife and in his friend to harbour a thought injurious to either.

Captain Spencer introduced Mr. Deloraine ; saying, that he had made his acquaintance two or three years ago at Hartley Grange. As we were to leave Florence at an early hour on the ensuing morning, we bade farewell to Captain Spencer before we separated, not without many mutual expressions of regret on his part and on Arthur's, at seeing so little of each other.

We walked on to the hotel in complete silence, which I had resolved that I would not be the first to break. Nor was I ; for my husband, who was quite free from that species of false pride in which I so gloried, came up to me, as I was sullenly reclining in a *fauteuil* after dinner, and kissed my forehead. But I turned away. Still he persevered.

"Caroline, my dearest wife, I am more vexed than I can tell you at having spoken so hastily to you in the Cascine this afternoon ; but you must allow that you have more than punished me for it. You certainly made me very angry, and I think not altogether without reason ; for I never could have believed that my own Caroline would have

used such harsh and bitter words towards her husband. But forgive me now, dearest, as I forgive you; and may this be our last—as it is our first—conjugal breach.”

I was melted, proud and unforgiving as I was; so I returned Arthur's embrace, expressed my contrition, and began to speak to him on the subject which so interested me. But there again we differed; for he would not hear of my interference in it. He said it could do no possible good, as I had nothing to go upon beyond the bare assertion of a young woman who was a stranger to me, and—

“Pardon me, Arthur,” said I, interrupting him; “Mr Willis's corroboration”——

“Which you are forbidden to mention,” rejoined Arthur.

“But surely that prohibition would not hold good in a case of such extremity,” I answered, still endeavouring to keep my temper.

“Not if you could give any proof, or even had any certainty yourself, that it is a case of such extremity; but being quite unassured of that, how could you, my dear Caroline, violate your solemn promise of secrecy to Mr Willis?”

“Very well,” I replied, no longer able to suppress my rising indignation; “very well, Arthur. It seems to be your pleasure to thwart and contradict me in every thing and my affection for you induces me to yield thus tamely but you may push the exercise of your authority a little too far. On this occasion, I am positive I am in the right; and I put it to your own candour to say, whether, if the case were one in which you were personally interested, you would not move heaven and earth in the cause?”

“Your being interested in any case would be quite enough to give me an interest in it also, as you very well know Caroline,” returned Arthur, kindly. “But how a lame, unsupported story like your's, can authorize our obtruding it on the Marchese Monti, I own I cannot see; nor can I give my sanction to such a proceeding on the part of my wife.”

I could not but admit in my own mind that there was much truth in what my husband said; but I hated to be conquered, and so relapsed into a state of sullenness. Arthur went out, leaving me to recover from it; and I was almost myself again when he came in.

"Where have you been, Arthur?" I asked, by way of intimating that he was restored to my good graces.

"Never mind," replied Arthur, mysteriously.

But I was in no humour to bear teasing, and repeated my question. As I could not elicit any satisfactory answer, I chose to imagine—silly fool that I was!—that my husband had been in quest of the fair unknown who so haunted my imagination. However, I did not at that time communicate my suspicions; and, in the space of about half an hour, peace and harmony were once more the order of the day; and, taking warning from this specimen, we preserved them unimpaired for many weeks afterwards.

I pass over what occurred during the remainder of a tour full of delights to us both, till we found ourselves once more at Florence, on our return to England. Nor have I much to record of what befell us there—only that I learned on inquiry that the Marchese Monti and his family had quitted Florence, and, it was believed, had gone to England.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE evening, about seven months after our marriage, a circle of friends was assembled in the house we had taken for the remainder of the season in Brook Street.

It was the middle of June, and a beautiful sunset had succeeded to a no less beautiful day. I thought how far more glorious it must appear, gilding in its descent the woods and slopes of Vernon Hall, and shedding its last bright beams of light on the old mansion, seeming to linger fondly over the rich and lovely scene.

But I was in no melancholy mood, but in my gayest and wildest spirits; talking to one, laughing with another, and successfully endeavouring to throw my guests together—a task sometimes rather difficult to accomplish in a London party, where many are strangers to each other, and there is no dancing or other amusement to be enjoyed in common, and serve as a bond of mutual attraction and union for the time being. Arthur, who was fond of dancing, had more than once suggested its introduction at our own house; but I had never thoroughly cared for it, and now I was not merely indifferent to it, I was really averse to it—as far as myself was concerned; and, though I would gladly have seen our visitors amused, if amused they could be, by such a species of entertainment, yet I could not endure that my husband should show his partiality for what I esteemed so frivolous a diversion, and therefore I had never encouraged the idea.

Arthur had sold out of the army at the time of our marriage; and, just before he arrived in England, one of the representatives of our county had died, and my father's interest had easily secured Captain Mildmay Vernon's return for the vacant seat. I was not a little pleased at this, and

received the congratulations of our friends that evening with undisguised satisfaction.

"How vastly condescending Mrs. Mildmay Vernon is to-night?" I heard Mrs. Fitzmaurice remark to her still faithful swain, Mr. Bankes. (These two, and Miss Bateman, were seated on an ottoman, partaking of the refreshments that were being handed round.)

"Yes," he returned, "her demeanour well befits her exalted station; and, to a woman gifted with her vigour of mind and development of intellect, her husband's recently acquired position, as a senator of this vast and mighty empire, must inevitably be a source of great delight. Not," he continued, raising his voice, as he observed that he had already attracted the notice of those near him—"not that I would for an instant undervalue the constitutions of other countries, by instituting any unfair comparisons between them and our own—no; for that would show me a narrow-minded bigot, not a true patriot. But, in tracing the various forms of government from the earliest period of which we have any record down to the present time—in tracing, I say, the various forms of human institutions, surely we cannot err, in observing with Mr. Burke, in his admirable work on the French revolution"—

Mr. Bankes's eloquent discourse was here brought to a sudden and unlooked for termination by the descent of the contents of a glass of ice on his knee. His neighbours, who had been listening to him in mute astonishment, could barely repress their inclination to laugh; while Miss Bateman, who was the delinquent, exclaimed, with an affected simper—

"La! how awkward of me! I beg your pardon, Mr. Bankes, I am sure. To think of *my* doing such a clumsy thing—it quite shocks me, I declare!"

"Give it not an instant's thought, my dear Miss Bateman," returned the gallant lieutenant, who was doing his best to efface the traces of the disaster from his attire; "too honoured I say, to suffer at such hands"—

"Now, you naughty man, have done," said Miss Bateman; "don't make me blush—pray, don't: you know I cannot endure a compliment," and she pretended to turn away her face. I had seen the accident, and stepped forward to ask Mr. Bankes if a servant should be summoned to attend him to another room; but this he gratefully declined, and

continued to rub away with considerable vigour, observing as he went on—

“This little incident recalls to my mind the trite but true saying, How much easier it is to undo than to do—to break than to make. These stains, I fear quite ineffaceable—no matter, indeed, Miss Bateman—these ineffaceable stains, I say, have been the work of a moment ; while the garment they have destroyed, has employed days, perhaps weeks, in its construction, or rather in its conversion into its present form ; and has been the means of employing many hands, otherwise reduced to involuntary idleness, and has filled many mouths, otherwise empty. Thus it is that the luxuries of the rich”——

Mr. Bankes was again stopped short ; but this time it was by the silvery voice of his mistress, who, eloquent as she considered her admirer to be, was apt to get a little tired of his harangues when they were so far beyond her comprehension. “You take it most good-naturedly, I am sure,” she murmured ; “like yourself, Nor—Mr. Bankes.”

The half-whispered reply I did not catch ; but I now addressed Mrs. Fitzmaurice, asking how long she had been in town, and saying I did not know of her being there till she entered the room with Miss Bateman that evening. I learned that she was staying with the Batemans, as I had supposed ; but I was at a loss to imagine what could have induced them to invite one who was certainly no favourite either with mother or daughter, and who was still young enough and pretty enough to be a rival to the latter, in their striving after that attention and homage which was the leading object of desire with both. But a good-natured “friend” of both parties informed me, that Mrs. Bateman had been too unwell lately to go out with her daughter ; and, as there was no one else to act as a constant *chaperone* to Miss Bateman, they had agreed to ask Mrs. Fitzmaurice to be their guest, with the view of making her useful in that capacity ; and, as she was but too delighted to be introduced into the gay world, and share in those amusements which her own limited fortune only enabled her to indulge in sparingly, she came to town directly, and the arrangement was a mutual convenience. She came ; but not without many protestations to her country neighbours of the enormous sacrifice she was making to friendship, and of how little her sad and widowed heart

could taste of pleasure in the diversions of a hollow, frivolous world ; but she could not bear that darling Kitty should lose what at her age it was so natural for her to relish, through any selfishness of hers ; so the fair victim gratified her own strongest wishes, while endeavouring to impress upon others that she was making the most entire renunciation of them, and established herself as an inmate in the house Mrs. Bateman had taken in London.

Perhaps her's was not an uncommon case ; for do we not often see persons endeavouring to deceive both themselves and their fellow-creatures into the belief that they are performing some extraordinary act of self-abnegation, while in reality they are doing that which is most conducive to their own pleasure, most in accordance with their own desires ?

But we will leave such sage reflections to Mr. Bankes—Mr. Bankes, who happened so conveniently to be on leave, and in town, just now ! An additional reason for her anxiety to avoid the great Babylon, as Mrs. Fitzmaurice took occasion to observe before quitting home ; for the young man quite pestered her ! He had many good points, she really believed, and he was certainly a very superior sort of person, and entirely wrapt up in her ; but she could not bear the idea of exciting any false hopes in one for whom she had so true a regard. She had never forgiven herself for having tormented the poor dear captain so before their marriage, or rather engagement ; until at last he had been driven into a state of frenzy, and in her presence, and that of two or three brother officers, had flung open the window, and was actually going to cast himself headlong from it, when she had interposed, and saved his life by promising to be his. However, she was older now, and was resolved never to act thus cruelly a second time ; so perhaps, after all, it might be better for her and Mr. Bankes to meet again at once, when she could crush his aspirations before it was too late to prevent his doing something dreadful.

However, Mrs. Fitzmaurice evidently had not the heart that evening to quench the flame which her charms, assisted perhaps by her little fortune, had kindled in the breast of this gallant son of Mars ; while poor Miss Bateman sat disconsolate and neglected, till Agnes, observing her situation, approached her, with the view of endeavouring to amuse her. (Agnes had come to town about a week before with Mr. and

Mrs. Willis, for such was the name now borne by Mordaunt; and the three were staying with us.) E. Kitty cared little enough to talk to another young lady, and her replies to my cousin's attempts at conversation were short, silly, and somewhat ungracious. And when Capt. Spencer, who had been talking and laughing with me on my leaving him, addressed Miss Bray instead of M. Bateman, the latter was thoroughly mortified; for she had conceived the hope of making a conquest of the handsome captain, and she could not hide her vexation. So she sat aloud to Mrs. Fitzmaurice—

"I do think, Dora, that this is the very dullest, stupidest party I have been at this season! Not a creature to speak to. I am sure you must be very tired of it; I am sick of death; surely we had better go."

"Why, my darling child," returned her friend in a coaxing tone, "we have not been here an hour; we cannot be so rude—and, indeed, I do not find it so stupid."

At that instant, Lord and Lady Tintern, and Lady Laura Tintern, were announced. They had but just arrived in town, Lord Tintern having been laid up with a long illness at his house in the country; and, as I had missed them in my morning visit, this was our first meeting since we had parted on the morning of our wedding-day. Arthur and Lord Tintern had met at the club; and from my husband I had had a sad account of the altered looks of his friend. But I was hardly prepared for so complete a wreck. Not only were his features sunken and hollow, and his face pallid—but this might have been the effect of bodily ailment; but that quiet, gentle, yet once happy countenance was an abiding presence of melancholy and dejection, most painful to witness. Lady Tintern was unchanged, except that her attire was more gorgeous than it had been in the days of Miss Sutherland, and her ornaments were handsomer and more numerous. They were accompanied by her brother Frank, who, through the interest of Lord Tintern's family, had been appointed to a lucrative post under government, while the other brother, who was in a dragoon regiment, had his debts (of no trifling amount) paid for him, and was given a fresh start in the world.

Laura was the same graceful, elegant creature that she had been seven months before, but more womanly in appearance

and manner, and she looked less bright and joyous. Perhaps this was owing to the long and severe illness of the brother she so dearly loved, or perhaps——But she has just caught sight of Henry Mordaunt, and the least possible flush mantles her pale cheek for a second, and leaves it a shade paler than before. Agnes went forward to meet her friend, and I saw that Henry's eye followed my cousin, and only lighted for an instant on her rival—if rival she could be called.

"My dearest Caroline," said the sweet tones of a well-known voice, "how rejoiced I am to see you again, and to see you, if possible, transcending the Miss Vernon of former days! This is, indeed, a meeting that we have been anticipating with real delight; though, alas! my husband's sad state of health for the last three months had banished hope in almost any shape. Thank Heaven! he is now better."

We shook hands with great seeming cordiality; but the presence of company prevented our giving way to that more tender method of salutation in which ladies are wont to indulge so freely, and with such diffuseness. Lord Tintern was the first to mention Arthur, who was in the music-room; and Augusta responded, asking me if he was quite well—if foreign parts had altered him at all; and said she had rejoiced to hear of his having obtained a seat in parliament, where he would doubtless acquit himself with credit. It would be so pleasant for them, too, she added; for her husband being also an M.P., he and Captain Mildmay Vernon would be much thrown together, and their wives would benefit by the increased degree of intercourse between the two gentlemen. This was said most kindly and winningly, and in the most straightforward manner possible; and though with Augusta I was always on the watch for double-dealing, especially where Arthur was concerned, I answered her in the spirit in which she apparently spoke.

Oh! how joyous I felt that evening! as though every dearest wish of my heart had been gratified, and I had nothing left to desire. Perhaps there are few who have not experienced such hours, if not days, of contentment and happiness. With me they were rare; and with me, as with many others, how generally do they seem but the precursor of some terrible blow. But no darkening shadow swept over me that night; "the flight of time," as its progress was

marked in silver tones by the richly ornamented clocks, indeed "only tread on flowers."

Lady Tintern made no effort to engross my husband's attention; but after greeting him as an old friend, and conversing with him for a few minutes, she turned away, and talked first to one, and then to another, with that bright graceful manner, which, joined to her striking beauty, caused her to be so great a favourite with those to whom she was but little known. I had no opportunity of saying much to Laura, for my office as hostess gave me constant occupation. I observed, however, that Lord Tintern sat down upon a solitary ottoman, evidently suffering from the lassitude and weariness consequent upon his illness, and soon appeared lost in a reverie.

There was an author present, whose notice Mr. Norman Banks was very solicitous to obtain; but, as he could not ask Captain Mildmay Vernon or myself to introduce him without any especial plea for the request, he was fain to wait his opportunity. Mr. X. was a writer whose vocation aimed at it was to expose, with the pen of masterly satire, the prevailing vices and follies of the day—and yet, not only this or of any one time; for, as human nature is essentially the same in all ages, his works might be said to be written for posterity, scarcely less than for his contemporaries. Mr. Banks would have preferred a man of science or philosophy to one whom he esteemed but a light and airy trifler in comparison; but he was always pleased to be brought into contact with any person of note or celebrity; and it was a record in his regiment that he had once been known to leave a poetical epistle, containing an offer of his heart at hand, at the door of a young poetess, with whom he had danced at a public ball the night before. The sequel of the adventure—so the story went on to say—was not exactly in accordance with the hero's wishes; for, after having waited in vain for a fortnight, and still receiving no answer to his effusion, he attended the next ball at the town where he had first met, and where they then met again; but on his approaching the lady, and requesting, in a tone of tender reproach, the favour of the first disengaged dance, she cast him so decidedly and so completely with the air of novelty having seen him before, that even Mr. Norman Banks was disconcerted, and lost his presence of mind for the moment.

especially when he saw the extreme amusement depicted on the countenances of the bystanders.

I do not know whether this warning had made him more cautious, or whether a few added years had sobered him a little; but his generalship was certainly of a more guarded and less dashing order on the present occasion. It was diverting to see him walking up and down with Mrs. Fitzmaurice on one arm and Miss Bateman on the other, just in front of where Mr. X. was seated, conversing with Lady Tintern, Mr. Willis, and Captain Spencer. Augusta, who was always ready for any thing in the shape of fun, and who at once descried Mr. Bankes's object, said, in an audible whisper—

"I am sure your friend is wishing to speak to you, Captain Spencer, and does not like to interrupt you while you are talking to us. Mr. Bankes," raising her voice, "I have no desire to monopolize all these gentlemen. Is it Captain Spencer, or Mr. Willis, or—but I believe you are not acquainted with Mr. X.? But we are discussing rather a knotty point in literature, and you could help us very much, I am convinced, with your accurate knowledge and judgment. Allow me to make you and Mr. X. known to each other. Mr. X.—Mr. Norman Bankes."

The two gentlemen bowed; and Lady Tintern gave a merry glance at the author, who immediately guessed that she was wishing to draw the young man out. But Mr. Willis, who, though much altered by his happy marriage, yet retained some of his cynicism, and all the original integrity of his nature, and who could never see the fun of telling untruths, not even playful untruths, at once said—

"I must be guilty of the rudeness of contradicting a lady; for the real truth, Mr. Bankes, is, that nothing has been further from our conversation than the subject of literature. Lady Tintern, in her usual brilliant style, has been favouring us with some anecdotes of her *friends*, which will doubtless be very serviceable to Mr. X. when he is writing his next number; and he and Spencer and I have been playing chiefly the part of listeners."

Lady Tintern looked vexed, and a cloud passed over her fair face; but, recovering herself immediately, she smiled, and said—

"Mr. Willis is quite right, as I am sure Lord Tintern

would say. It is a very bad habit not to adhere strictly to the truth, even in trifles."

Captain Spencer here made some alighting observation about the dulness of some persons who could not take a joke; but Augusta stopped him, saying—

"Indeed, Captain Spencer, I perfectly agree with Mr. Willis. Those who do not respect truth in trifles, will never respect it on more important occasions."

This remark was intended to have been heard by all; but it was lost on Mr. X., into whose astonished ear Mr. Banks was already pouring forth one of his choicest orations, on the influence exercised by the literature of the day on the minds of the people. If Mr. Willis heard it, he took no notice of it; but Captain Spencer had his retaliation.

"Yes," he said, in a lower tone; "at Vernon Hall I first learned to know your sentiments on these subjects, Lady Tintern, and I take shame to myself for having so soon forgotten them."

He knew her life's secret, and knew that she dared not quarrel with him. I waited not to see whether she showed any sign of a desire to do so; for I had been hovering near the group during the foregoing scene, with the intention of asking Lady Tintern to take her seat at the harp; and now I hesitated not to interpose, wishing to prevent the continuance of so inharmonious a strain. Augusta acceded at once to my request, for she was not one of those ladies who require so much pressing before they will consent to enchain the company, that it becomes a heavy tax to pay, even for the most first-rate performance. Such in truth was Augusta's, for she was a perfect mistress of her instrument and her graceful and elegant figure never appeared to greater advantage than when seated at it.

I thought Captain Spencer repented of his hastiness, for he said to me—

"In my opinion, none but a handsome woman should attempt to play the harp. I confess that the performance of a plain, dowdy, awkward-shaped girl, would have no charm for me, however excellent it might be in itself." And when Augusta had passed out of hearing, he added—"I know you are placed above envy, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon; and, more over, I know you are one of the few who can love a sister's charms."

"There can be but one opinion about Lady Tintern's beauty or her music," I returned: "look, how many she has already gathered around her!"

Augusta played two effective, but short pieces, for she never ran the risk of wearying her audience; and when she had concluded these solos, she called to her sister-in-law to come and accompany her on the piano. Laura, without possessing any great power of execution, played well, and with spirit and expression. I was delighted; and perhaps my gratification was not lessened when I saw that Arthur stood by the piano instead of the harp, and turned over Laura's pages instead of Augusta's.

I have said before how joyous I was that evening; and yet for a time I felt sad, as my eye happened to rest on Lord Tintern. He was standing by the folding-doors which separated the front from the back drawing-room, where the music was going on; and he was steadily gazing on his wife. But he looked so far from happy, that I wondered whether he had already discovered how little that wife in reality cared for him—how much for the station and the wealth which he had bestowed on herself and her family.

Perhaps he could not but feel how she outshone him in society—how her brilliancy, hollow as it was, was more valued than his depth of reading and knowledge, which he had not the art of bringing forward in conversation. Perhaps he felt, too, that in the midst of her triumphs it was to the world, and not to him whose world was centered in her, that she looked for the applause and admiration which were certainly her due. Essentially domestic himself, he was united to one to whom the very idea of family pleasures and endearments was tame and insipid. All this he might have discovered: but the one dread secret he had yet to learn—that secret which, once revealed to a man of his enthusiastic, though quiet nature, must deprive him of happiness for ever.

I do not mean that the mere circumstance of Lady Tintern having once loved another—even had she been actually engaged to him—would of itself have marred the conjugal felicity either of herself or her husband; such is the theory only of romancers, and of those who believe in them—a fallacy which we see contradicted every day in real life; but the fact of her sedulous concealment of her attachment to Arthur, her actually entertaining it in all its force at the very time

of her marriage, and her making not the slightest effort to overcome it afterwards—these were the quicksands on which the vessel of Lord Tintern's hopes and joys was liable at any moment to be wrecked.

Soon he sat down again, as though not yet strong enough to stand without fatigue: and when the ladies had finished playing, Arthur came to tell me that I was expected to sing while Augusta, leaving her seat at the harp, approached her husband, and tenderly asked him if he were not tired, as if he would not like to go home after they had heard our song from Mrs. Mildmay Vernon?

"I am very tired, dear Augusta," was his gentle reply "but I don't like to take you and Laura away, and I will send the carriage back for you, so that you need not be at all hurried. I shall stay for one song, however; for it will be a treat indeed to hear Caroline again."

"I shall certainly accompany you home, dear Edward," said his wife; "and I am sure Mrs. Baring will gladly bring Laura, if she prefers staying."

Edward's face brightened at these affectionate words; for he was the least exacting of mortals, and the smallest mark of fondness or attention from Augusta sufficed to cheer him and to make him reproach himself for any injurious suspicions, that were sometimes forced upon him, of her want of true love for him. I chose a song which I knew to be a favourite of his; and the husband and wife walked away together, both looking perfectly contented and satisfied.

In the doorway they encountered Mr. Deloraine, who waited to speak to them before he advanced further; but seeing me occupied at the piano, he stopped by the side of Lady Laura. I sang my best, and pleased Arthur, which gratified me far more than all the praises of my audience. When I observed Mr. Deloraine's entrance, I remembered that he had been expected, though I had not remarked his absence; and I could not imagine what had induced him to come so late, for our guests were already beginning to take their departure. But he soon enlightened me in part by saying that he had been unavoidably detained, but that he was glad to see us, if only for a minute, to tell us that he was very desirous to have a little private conversation the next morning, either with Captain Mildmay Vernon or myself, or with both of us, if we were disengaged. We

appointed eleven o'clock for the interview ; and, after lingering again for a short time to talk to Laura Tintern, he went away.

Soon after all the company dispersed : the lights were extinguished ; the street, lately resounding with the noise of carriages and the din of voices, became silent and almost deserted ; and, as the clock struck three, we sought the repose which I believe was more welcome to all than to myself, for I felt not the slightest sensation of fatigue in body or mind ; and my last words to my husband, before closing my eyes, were, that I had spent one of the happiest evenings of my life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE of the happiest evenings of my life !—And, oh ! what a dread awakening !

From a deep and peaceful slumber I was aroused by a hurried tap at the door of our chamber. Arthur heard not ; but I spoke out to know the hour, supposing it the servant who had come to call us. This roused my maid ; but it was the voice of Agnes, which said—

“ It is I, Caroline ; let me know as soon as I can have a few minutes’ conversation with you.”

I could detect agitation in her tones, notwithstanding my endeavour to speak calmly ; and I hastened to throw on my dressing-gown, and followed my cousin to her room. Her face was very pale, and her hand trembled a little ; but she struggled hard to appear composed, and was about to say so when I stopped her—

“ Agnes, I know by your look and manner that you have some unpleasant news for me. God grant it may be not much worse than unpleasant ; but no false idea of breaking my heart will render it more palatable. What is it ?”

The early sun was streaming into the apartment, and its vivid light I could observe every change in Agnes. She was now as flushed as she had just before been pale ; but she spoke at once—

“ Then prepare yourself for the worst, my dearest Caroline. Your father” —

“ Is he ill ?” I demanded, seizing hold of her arm. “ For pity’s sake, tell me, Agnes ! Oh, my God ! he is *dead*. I *know* he is !”

My cousin remained silent, as though she had not the resolution to set the seal to my despair ; but I needed no confirmation of the truth—I *felt* it was so ! But I did :

faint, nor burst into convulsive sobs ; the effect of my first great sorrow—the greatest, save one, that could have befallen me—was to turn me to stone. I sank down upon a chair, and sat perfectly still ; while Agnes knelt by me, and, taking my hand in her's, kissed it repeatedly, and bathed it with tears which I had no power to shed. And in those few seconds the whole of my former life passed in review before me, with the clearness and distinctness which I have heard described as the sensations of one rescued, but just in time, from a watery grave ; and, till the last year, one figure stood prominent among the rest, as the source of my childish enjoyment and my girlish happiness—and that figure was my father's.

Arthur had hastily dressed himself, and now came into Agnes's room. His entrance recalled me to myself ; for, in the sort of trance into which I had fallen, all sense of suffering had passed away, and for a minute I gazed at him in stupid bewilderment. My husband looked from me to my cousin, who handed him a letter which I had not previously remarked that she was holding. I saw Arthur's face change as he read it ; and, when he had done, I stretched out my hand for it. But Arthur returned it to Agnes, who passed it on to me, while he asked her who had brought it.

She answered, that two messengers from Vernon Hall had been travelling all night ; the one first despatched had conveyed only by word of mouth the intelligence of his master's sudden attack ; but he had been overtaken by the second, bearing the tidings of his death.

I was now shaking from head to foot ; but I endeavoured to read the note, which was from Mrs. Mivart—

“MY DEAR YOUNG LADY—I trust that neither you, nor my dear young mistress, will be quite unprepared for the blow ; for I told old Robert to say there was little hope, and she and the Captain must hasten off directly. My honoured master has just expired ; he only spoke once after the stroke ; and that was to bless her ladyship and his daughter, and say that, if it had pleased God, he would have been glad to live to see his child again, and her husband also. ‘But God's will be done!’ And five minutes after that he was gone. Mr. Welling was with him when he died, and bids me tell you that nothing but a miracle could have saved him.

"Her ladyship was terribly upset at first, but we have persuaded her to go to bed, and she is quieter and better now. She sends her kindest love, and hopes you will soon be here.

"I thought it best to write to you, Miss, that you might break it to my young lady—I remain, your humble servant

"DOROTHEA MIVART.

"VERNON HALL, June —, 18—."

By ten o'clock, Agnes, Arthur, and I were on our way to Vernon Hall. During all those long, long hours of journey which seemed to me as though it would never come to an end, I remained in that one tearless agony, to which the outpouring of the bitterest tears is happiness in comparison. Occasionally I even made remarks on indifferent subjects, and a casual observer might have imagined that nothing was oppressing me. But when we drew near to the old familiar places, and each pathway and lane, as we drew swiftly by, was fraught with some memory of him who was gone; when, at length, we reached the lodge gates, and stopped on the exact spot where, not a year ago, my father had been waiting to welcome me home—then my pent feelings found vent, and I wept aloud.

My overcharged heart was already somewhat relieved when we arrived at the hall-door. Arthur handed me on, and I ran up-stairs to my mother's room, and gently opened the door.

"Ah! Agnes, is that you? I knew you would come to me, my child," said a low voice.

But I had heard enough. I shut the door without entering; and meeting Mrs. Mivart, who had followed me, I took her hand, and asked her where my father—where he had remained of him—was laid.

"In his own room."

I did not wait for more, and, heedless of the remonstrance which the old servant began to pour forth, I went into the apartment. It was of course partially darkened, but still I could clearly distinguish all surrounding objects. I approached the coffin, but paused; for, with all my vaunted strength of mind, I wanted courage to look upon the face of the dead. I had never beheld the corpse even of one indifferent to me; and how should I bear the first sight now

At last, with one desperate effort, I lifted the covering, and saw that I so dreaded, yet so longed for. Long did my eyes continue fixed upon the form of my father; for my gaze was riveted as though held by some strange fascination. Then I knelt down and prayed.

Oh! had I thus prayed, not once only, but again and again, that God would soften my proud and stubborn heart, and enable me to conquer my jealous disposition, that sight might indeed have been blessed for evermore. As it was, however, the effect was but temporary. It is to be hoped that there are very few who can look upon death in any shape, more especially in that of one most near and dear to them, without becoming gentler and humbler and more charitable—without having their hearts opened to a keener perception of the sufferings of others, and a keener compassion for them—without feeling, at least for the moment, how unreal is every thing save that world in which the spirits of the dead must have their eternal awakening.

They left me to myself for half an hour, kindly and wisely judging that so it was best to do. Then Arthur came, and led me to my mother.

I will pass over the events, or rather the nothings, of the week that intervened before the funeral—how I was so absorbed in the indulgence of my own grief, and believed my mother so utterly incapable of sharing it, that I would scarcely see her, and could not bear the society of any but my husband. How Agnes was thus driven, against her own desire and sense of what was right, to take my place, and act a daughter's part to Lady Vernon; while I was vexed at the involuntary importance she thus acquired as the chief comfort of the widow, and yet would have been equally vexed had she neglected her. I knew, from what my cousin has since told me, that my mother's mourning was sincere and heartfelt; for, in the solemn presence of death, she forgot the weary years of neglect and solitude, and remembered only the spring-time of youth and of love. She had always steadfastly believed that before their marriage she had possessed her husband's affections, and had afterwards forfeited them, more through the inferiority of her own character to his, than from any fault or unkindness on his part. When we met each morning, she always kissed me affectionately; but it was not to me that she looked for consolation or support—

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to Agnes first, and then to Arthur. For he was ever ready to perform for her those many little kind and thoughtful acts, to the practice of which his deep affection for his mother had habituated him from early childhood; and I rejoiced in this, as far as I could rejoice in any thing.

Oh! it is a sad and bitter feeling, when, the first sorrow over, we realize in all its fulness the consequences of a loss; when to the mysterious awe naturally inspired by death, is added the affliction of its having removed from the author of our being, the parent who loved us with that unselfish love which rejoices in the happiness of its object when far away, when the child has left the home of early years, and no longer contributes in the same degree to cheer and comfort the father or the mother. Most love exacts at least an equal return—an equal measure of devotion; but the love of a parent is apart from all selfish consideration. And as time passes on, and deadening the force of our sorrows, in a case like the present makes us feel that it is the course of nature for the old to go first to the tomb, and for the young to survive them: still, there are moments when the haunting tones of a voice which never reached our ears but in the language of affection—when the eyes, which looked with such partial indulgence upon the faults and failings so harshly condemned by others, revisit us in our waking thoughts, or in the more vivid and fanciful images of our dreams—when the tears, which we can often suppress from the eyes, flow forth from the heart; and when unkind, and neglectful, and selfish actions, however trifling they might once have appeared, rise up in judgment against us, and add the pangs of self-reproach to those which death has caused us. Oh! if we could but realize, while those who love are yet with us, how, when they are taken from us, we shall grieve over the hasty or bitter words we have been tempted to utter, how we shall desire to recall the days that are gone for ever, what should we not then be spared! We may learn to bow in true and deep resignation to the chastening Hand of God; but for self-accusation, the solace, the remedy, can only be sought by the rough and thorny path of repentance. Happy, indeed, are they who have considered in time the things that belong unto their peace—they can look on the lifeless form of a beloved parent, and can truly feel that they have left nothing undone that the

could do to prove their dutiful gratitude to one whose life was a scene of devotion to them from the cradle to the present hour.

If the grief I have represented myself to have experienced should be deemed exaggerated, let it be remembered that the childish affection, which is generally shared by both parents, and often by brothers and sisters, with me had all been concentrated in my father. And, moreover, my disposition was not one to seek elsewhere for those youthful companions whom I had not at home ; so that my rearing and education had differed in many respects from that of other children.

The poet has said—

“ All men think all men mortal but themselves ; ”

and perhaps we may extend this feeling to those most nearly belonging to us. We hear of the death of an acquaintance almost with indifference—of a friend with sorrow, but it passes quickly away : but it is when one to whose presence we have been daily and hourly accustomed is smitten down ; the body which, to our material eyes, seems so identified with the beloved being consigned to corruption and decay ; the spirit, departed to that mysterious world of which we can form no adequate idea ;—then, indeed, is death brought home to us, and we are led to consider the end of our existence here in a very different temper and manner from those of our previous life.

I have said that such salutary impressions with me were transient, but not so the grief with which I sorrowed. It remained with me long ; but it has left me now, because I know how rapidly I am hastening from this earthly scene.

When the last sad offices were over, Arthur returned to London to resume his attendance at the House. He was also anxious to see his mother and sister, who were on the point of embarking for India, whither Major Douglas had been compelled to precede his bride-elect.

Lady Vernon's health was so visibly failing, that further advice became necessary for her ; and it was agreed that, in the course of another week, she should accompany Agnes and myself to Brook Street. But she did not live to go there ; for three days after my husband's departure, she began to sink so rapidly that it was found impossible to move her, and in less than a month from the time of his

burial, her remains were laid by those of her husband in the quiet Church of Leyton. She died resigned and peaceful and for the last fortnight my care was unremittingly joined to that of Agnes; and on her death-bed she blessed me fervently with her low weak voice, and told me how inexpressibly dear I had ever been to her. The maternal instinct rose uppermost at the last, and even Agnes was little regarded in comparison.

Arthur came to attend my mother's funeral; and we returned to town accompanied by my cousin, whose home, I told her, must henceforth be with me. A week later, I received the following note from Mr. Deloraine:—

"MY DEAR MADAM—It is with great reluctance that I intrude upon you at this season, and it is only the urgency of my case which can at all justify my doing so.

"I am at Dover, as the date of this letter will show you; and I intend to proceed to Italy without delay, unless I hear that a young person, by name Maria Salvi, is to be found in any part of England. I have reason to believe that this young person was formerly known to you when she was residing in the village of Leyton. At that time I was led to form an estimate of her character and actions which I am now inclined to think was a mistaken one; but I am unwilling to give my reasons for having adopted a contrary opinion, as, by so doing, I must lay heavy charges on the head of one closely related to a valued and intimate friend. If, therefore, you can afford me any clue as to where Mademoiselle Salvi is to be found, you will be conferring upon me a real obligation; and in return I pledge my word that I am not seeking her with the intention of acting towards her in any way that can possibly injure or annoy her.

"With my kind regards to Captain Mildmay Vernon—I remain, dear madam, yours very faithfully,

"ALFRED DELORAINE

"—— HOTEL, DOVER."

I handed the note to Arthur as we sat at the breakfast-table, saying, how I lamented having lost sight of my former *protégé*. I knew that she had quitted Leyton during our sojourn abroad—at least, so I had discovered on our return to England; for my father had not mentioned the circum-

stance in his letters, and the Misses Mordaunt had been absent from the Rectory. And, to tell the truth, as the scene at Florence had faded from my mind, so had poor Maria become gradually obliterated from my thoughts, and almost forgotten by me. The sight of Mr. Willis had recalled her to my recollection; but I was unwilling to allude to so painful a subject, to which, for many reasons, he was not likely to lead himself. But my husband now suggested that perhaps he might be able to give the desired information.

"True," I replied; "Arthur, will you ask him?"

"I will go to him this morning," he rejoined, "and come straight home again to tell you the result."

Mr. and Mrs. Willis had taken apartments in town when they left Brook Street, Mr. Willis being desirous to attend some scientific meetings and lectures; and we thought Arthur would be just in time to see them before they left London. So it proved; for he found Mrs. Willis and her sister Emma in the midst of trunks and handboxes, which were packed, and standing in the hall, ready for departure at a very early hour the next morning. After the inquiries for me and for Agnes had been made and answered, Arthur asked if he could see Mr. Willis, and was led by that gentleman's wife to the door of a small back parlour, which he had converted into a temporary study. He was immersed in his books and writings, and did not know that any one had entered the room till Emily gently touched him on the shoulder, saying—

"Here is Captain Mildmay Vernon wishing particularly to speak to you, Walter;" and, turning to Arthur, she added—"You will do me the greatest possible service, Captain Vernon, if you can prevail upon my husband to allow his books to be packed up; for how can they be ready to travel with us at five o'clock to-morrow morning, unless I have them soon?"

This habit of setting off so early, even for a journey of a few hours, was one of some little peculiarities contracted of late years by Mr. Willis, and in which his wife never thwarted him. But Arthur, who was not aware of this, naturally imagined that they had a long day's travelling before them, and inquired whither they were bound?

"To my friend Staunton's, at ——," said Mr. Willis, who

had by this time woke up to a consciousness of what was passing before him, and he named a place about five-and-twenty miles from London.

"Poor Mrs. Willis!" exclaimed Arthur, laughing; "why, where is the use" — but Mrs. Willis motioned to him not to pursue the subject; and he, taking the hint directly, proceeded—"Then where is the use of my dawdling here? for, as I have no chance of seeing you after this morning, I had better enter upon business at once."

"Emily, my love," said her husband; "will you leave us for a few minutes?" and she quitted the room.

"There goes the best and gentlest of wives," observed Mr. Willis, as the door closed upon her; for, reserved as he had ever been on the subject of his early attachment, he was always willing to speak of Emily, and extol her many good and excellent qualities, saying, he had at last met with sincerity in human form, and hoped that he, of all men, should know how to value it properly.

"I will not detain you long," Arthur began; "for I know Mrs. Willis is wanting these books and manuscripts."

"Ay, true," he said; "we will go into the next room, and leave the coast clear."

But Arthur failed in discovering what Mr. Deloraine wished to know: for Mr. Willis told him, in answer to his inquiries, that he had quite lost sight of Mademoiselle Salvi since she quitted Leyton; that he would never willingly have done so, and had told her that she should never be without a friend while he lived; but that she had been true to her kind, and especially her sex, by showing herself ungrateful, and had departed by night, and in haste, and without giving any one the slightest intimation of where she was going. He added, that he had seen Mr. and Mrs. Kidd, but that they knew nothing of her, except that she had punctually paid her rent up to the day of her flight.

Arthur said, that Mr. Willis had been unable to subdue all signs of emotion during this interview: it was probably the first time he had spoken to any man, whom he knew to be acquainted with his early history, on a topic so nearly concerning it.

I reluctantly communicated this unsatisfactory result to Mr. Deloraine, who only awaited such an answer to embark for Boulogne.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SUMMER has flown away—autumn has succeeded to it—and Christmas is near at hand. My husband and I are seated in the breakfast-room at Vernon Hall, lingering over the remains of the repast. It is a bright, mild morning, and Agnes has just gone by the window with my baby in her arms. The last few months have wrought other changes in our domestic circle than that of making us the parents of that baby-boy—changes, perhaps, scarcely remarked except by my cousin ; for these six months had been spent in comparative seclusion. One change, most sad and grievous, was the habit of frequent altercation which had arisen between the father and mother of that little child. The habit had originated in my proud and jealous temper ; and Arthur had wanted sufficient resolution and firmness to quell it at the outset, and now it seemed beyond his power to do so.

This morning, however, all was quiet and peaceful between the two who really loved each other so fondly ; and we had been agreeing that we would take advantage of the beauty of the day to pay a visit to Hartley Grange. Arthur was leaving the room to order the horses, when he met the servant bringing in the letters.

There was one for me from Lady Tintern, containing a warm and cordial invitation from herself and her husband to pass the ensuing Christmas with them. She explained that the family gathering and the usual festivities were to have taken place at Lord Hartley's ; but that, from his eldest daughter having become so confirmed a hypochondriac, her parents and sister were unwilling to make the house a scene of gaiety and rejoicing, while the one, so weak in body and mind, must remain apart from it all. Therefore Laura was to go to her brother's, and Christmas was to be kept at

Newton. Augusta added, that she was longing to make acquaintance with my darling baby, and to introduce her dear little girl to me.

"Fancy Augusta with an infant!" I exclaimed, as I finished reading the letter, to Arthur; "I should not imagine that her 'dear little girl' occupies a very large portion of her time and thoughts!"

"Well, Caroline, you will have an opportunity of observing her for yourself, in her new character of a mother. For what day is the invitation?"

"Do you mean to accept it?" I asked. I said this, not because I had any aversion to going, but because I did not like Arthur at once making up his mind without consulting me.

"Why not, my love?" returned my husband, kindly. "have you any objection? You know we had agreed that we should not receive company at home this winter; that Newton is by no means a large place, and the neighbourhood is a very dull one, so there cannot be any gay doings on so extensive a scale as to make it uncomfortable for you."

It was very natural that Arthur should enjoy the idea of a little variety, for he had devoted himself entirely to me during my retirement. This did come across me, and I said—

"True, my dear Arthur. I suppose our own party, with Laura, Captain Spencer, and Frank Sutherland, will nearly fill the house; and, as you say, the neighbourhood does not afford many opportunities of dissipation." Then, referring to the letter, I added; "I see that Agnes is most expressly included in the invitation."

"Does she say how poor Edward is?" asked Arthur.

"No, not a word," I answered; "but here is a little postscript, which I did not remark at first."

I read it aloud.

"I must not omit to tell you, dear Caroline, that I have a most charming young friend staying with me—an Italian whose acquaintance I made in town last spring, before you returned from foreign parts; I quite long to make you know to one another, as I am sure you will be mutually attracted. Dearest Edward had conceived a prejudice against her at first, and I told him I should have her to stop with me at Newton, as I could not rest satisfied till I had removed her. So here she is; and her manner to my husband is so gentle and winning, that his dislike must soon give way, if it be

not done so already. She is so fond of babies, and makes such a fuss with mine, that it will be quite a treat to her to have two in the house. By the by, of course you have now given up your old dislike of children—don't you remember how I used to scold you for it?"

"I call that great hypocrisy in Augusta," said I; "for her love of children vanished in a most marvellous manner when there were no grown-up spectators on the scene. However, *nous verrons!*"

Arthur quitted the room to prepare for our ride; and I called Agnes, and told her of our plans. She at once acquiesced in them, and said it was very good-natured of Lady Tintern to invite one of whom she knew so little.

"I suppose *my* cousin is good enough for Miss Sutherland!" I exclaimed, hastily; but the next instant I saw, by the colour on Agnes's cheek, what a rude, thoughtless observation I had made. I was going to apologize; but Agnes, who had before deposited the baby in my arms, went quickly out. For even she was not perfect, and she was really angry now. Not that she felt the injured pride of a dependent, for, by her uncle's will, she was amply provided for; but the least slur cast on the memory of her beloved father she could not endure patiently—indeed, it was almost the only affront that she ever resented.

On this occasion I had the magnanimity to seek her, and tell her how truly I repented my thoughtlessness. And I was greatly provoked with her because she did not appear duly gratified by this concession on my part, and immediately resume her wonted cordiality of manner. I forgot—or did not choose to remember—how very, very rarely, she suffered such feelings to gain the mastery over her, while I as rarely thought of even attempting to resist them.

As we rode along, Arthur asked me where my cousin had hidden herself after breakfast.

"Oh! Agnes was sulky," I returned, carelessly; "I dare say she will have got over it by dinner-time."

"Sulky!" repeated Arthur; "that is not often the case with Agnes. What had happened to make her sulky?"

"A hasty observation of mine, for which I took the trouble to follow her, and offer my apologies; but the young lady was not pleased to receive them graciously."

"Then you must have said something very unkind, Caro-

line; for Agnes is the last person to resent an imaginary offence."

"No matter!" I rejoined quickly; "I suppose freedom of speech is mine, at all events."

To this there was no reply, and we proceeded in silence. However, we were friends again before we reached Hartley Grange; and, as we rode through the noble park, and came in sight of the beautiful lawn, I re-called to my husband the day on which we had first seen each other at that brilliant fete. I had no time for the mournful recollections that might have risen up to cloud that bright memory; for a sudden turn brought us face to face with Laura Tintern, who was mounted on her pony, and enjoying a solitary ride through the grounds.

She was delighted to see us, but told us that her father and mother were out driving. She took us in to luncheon, and I mentioned the invitation we had had to Newton.

"Oh! I am so glad we are to meet there," she said; "and dear Agnes, too, I hope, will be of the party."

"Yes, I believe Agnes will go," I answered: "do you know of any one else, Laura?"

"I hear that they have asked Henry Mordaunt," said she, colouring a little.

I guessed that Augusta had done this good-naturedly, with the view of gratifying her sister-in-law.

"Oh! then I should not be surprised if Agnes were to decline," I remarked.

"Why? what was that to do with your cousin?" demanded the young girl quickly.

"My dear Laura, so intimate as you are with Agnes, you surely must know that she has rejected him."

"No, I did not," returned Laura, more quietly; but her voice trembled as she added—"I have at times fancied that I detected something of partiality in his manner to her. But why did she refuse him?"

"Ah! why, indeed?" I reiterated.

"Because she did not love him as she knew he deserved to be loved, Lady Laura," said Arthur.

"Or because she loved some one else better, perhaps," I interposed, rather maliciously.

Arthur's brow darkened at this; and I felt the bad taste of pursuing the subject, both on his account and Laura's.

The latter was endeavouring to regain her composure ; and, wishing to assist her, for, during this short conversation, a glimpse of the truth had visited me, I asked her if she knew much of this young Italian friend of her sister-in-law.

"Not even her name," replied Laura ; "for she happened to be out of town just at the time that I was with Edward and Augusta ; and, finding that the topic was an unpleasing one to my brother, I never alluded to it but once ; and, from Augusta herself being so silent about it, I concluded that she had given up the intimacy to please her husband. Therefore you see, I may well be surprised to hear that we are to meet her at Newton. But, indeed, I must say I think it is greatly against her that Edward does not like her, for he is not one to take a groundless or capricious dislike to any one, and her being his wife's friend, I am sure, would only predispose him in her favour. But, I fear, it is only another proof"——

Here, remembering Arthur's presence, she broke off. The conversation after this rather languished ; for we were none of us in the highest spirits, and poor Laura vainly strove to rally her's. Before we left she asked me if I would mind going up-stairs to see Elizabeth, who, she said, would be gratified by the attention. I replied, I should be very glad to do so ; and the sister ran to announce my wish. But she came back with a disappointed face, saying that poor Lizzy did not feel equal to it to-day, though she was not the less sensible of my kindness.

"I thought she would, for she used to have Agnes to sit with her some hours every day when she was staying here," said Laura, unconscious of how unwelcome such a comparison was to me at the moment. "Give my kindest love to dear Agnes," Laura added, as if bent on proving to herself that her feelings were in no way altered towards her friend by hearing that she was the beloved of Henry Mordaunt.

As we rode home, I said to Arthur, "Laura loves Henry Mordaunt ;" and, though he would not admit that I was right, I was sure that he was himself convinced of the fact.

As I had foretold, my cousin had quite recovered herself when we met at dinner. She informed us that she had had a visit from Mrs. Fitzmaurice, who had formally announced to her her engagement to Mr. Bankes. Miss Bray was not

of a sarcastic turn of mind ; but she declared she had been able to keep her countenance at the absurd, coquettish manner in which the fair widow had compelled her to give what she herself was dying to tell.

"I could not but gratify her," said Agnes ; "and, had I been any one else, I should have been quite frightened at the effect of my words, for Mrs. Fitzmaurice covered her face and shrieked aloud. After a good deal of hesitation, she confessed that she had at length yielded to his ardent solicitations, though far more from the fear 'of his doing something dreadful,' if she persisted in her refusal of him, than from her own inclination ; 'as her heart,' she assured me, 'is still reposing in a coffin in a distant Irish churchyard.'"

"What stuff!" exclaimed Arthur ; "I have not the slightest doubt that she jumped at the first intimation of Bankes's part that he would marry her. His money, such as it is, she does not despise, as nothing better has fallen in her way ; indeed, she must have been almost in despair of seeing him, for it is pretty nearly a year and a half since he began to make love to him, I should think."

"Has any one else been here?" I asked.

"Mr. Henry Mordaunt came in while Mrs. Fitzmaurice was with me," said my cousin, speaking not without embarrassment.

"I find we are to meet him at Newton," I rejoined, looking steadily at her.

"He told me," answered Agnes, "that he had been invited, but hardly thought he should be able to go—at least to the events, not till after Christmas-day, which he wished to attend at the Rectory."

I was ashamed to pursue the subject, though my curiosity was roused to know whether Henry had had any special motive in calling during our absence. I changed the conversation by saying—

"I wonder when we shall hear of Mr. Deloraine? He promised to write, whether he was successful in his search after poor Mademoiselle Salvi or not."

"Perhaps you will hear of him through Spencer," suggested my husband. "By the by, Caroline, I fear this Italian friend of Lady Tintern's is not likely to be so pretty as the young lady we saw under the tree at Florence ; don't you remember?"

Even I could laugh at this remembrance now ; but I said that, from what I could recall of her face, I should have pronounced it much too fair for an Italian. Arthur laughed, saying he should have no objection to refresh his memory by another sight of the fair damsel.

Not many days elapsed before we found ourselves at Newton. As we drove through the neat, clean village, and observed the restored church, which had once been the subject of conversation at my own home, we could easily discern that neither money, time, nor the exercise of ability and judgment, had been spared by the principal inhabitant. From the description I had heard Lord Tintern give of the village before he took possession of his new house, I understood how complete was the transformation, and I wondered mentally how far Augusta had contributed to this happy result. The approach to our host's abode was thickly planted with shrubs and trees, and the grounds and garden bore evident marks of having been laid out and arranged by a tasteful hand. All, however, was on a small scale—small at least in comparison with Hartley Grange, or even with Vernon Hall—and there was a total absence of pretension.

We arrived earlier than we had ourselves anticipated, and, consequently, before we were expected. The servant who admitted us told us that his lordship was out riding, and her ladyship driving with the young lady who was staying with her. This sounded ominous, I thought ; for, as it appeared that no other guests had yet arrived, it would surely have been more natural for the adoring husband to have been escorting his wife and her friend, than to have gone off in a different direction. But Arthur laughed at what he was disposed (and no wonder) to call my premature suspicions, and suggested the possibility of Lord Tintern having some business or engagement, with the fulfilment of which the office of escorting ladies was not compatible. Agnes made no comment, and I only answered that I hoped it might be so.

My husband and I seemed to have begun another state of existence during the last few weeks, or rather to have resumed our once happy one ; for the voice of dissension, or opposition to each other's wishes, had, during this blessed interval, rarely, if ever, been heard between us. Alas, it was too good to last ! My jealousy of my cousin had long

since subsided, or I should never have asked her to become an inmate of our home ; but my mind was not quite so fully at rest with regard to Lady Tintern, and I expected that this visit would either dispel or confirm my doubts, as to whether she had yet any hope of gaining Arthur's affection, or whether she had learnt to subdue her own for him, and transfer it to its lawful object.

But it was time to have my child taken up-stairs. Augusta's nurse, a Swiss, and her lady's-maid, a young French-woman, were speedily in attendance ; and in the background I discerned another young person, who proved to be also French, and who came forward, and with much civility proffered her services to Agnes. This was the attendant of Lady Tintern's Italian friend, and she bore the name of Françoise.

Before we had had time to follow the guidance of these domestics, the sound of wheels was heard, first rapidly approaching, then quickly coming to a stop ; and, looking out of the window, I saw my gratuitous assumption of Lord Tintern's abandonment of the ladies completely refuted, for he was dismounting from his horse, and preparing to assist their descent from the elegant little pony chaise, by the side of which he had evidently been riding. Arthur glanced at me, and smiled. A minute more, and I found myself warmly clasped in the arms of Augusta, who embraced me in the most fervent manner, and shook hands with Agnes and Arthur, while I went through the same friendly greeting and welcome from Lord Tintern. A hasty glance sufficed to show me that she was looking no less beautiful, and he not much more bright or robust, than when we had parted in London some months ago. And now Lady Tintern called to her friend, who had retired into the background while the above scene was going on ; and I turned with my most gracious air to receive this introduction from the young foreigner. Judge of my horror and astonishment when Augusta fondly took her hand, and presented her to me as—"My dear friend, Mademoiselle Monti!"

My self-possession was not easily disturbed, but on this occasion I confess it was gone for the minute ; and though as yet I knew not the worst which was destined one day to be proved against her, I experienced a kind of shuddering sensation, as though I were standing in the presence of a

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miniature Marchioness of Brinvilliers, or of any of those daring and unscrupulous women, whose crimes, in different ages, "have gained them a niche in the temple of infamy." I suppose that the shock I had sustained, or the uncomfortable feeling I have described, must have made my manner appear odd and constrained; for Augusta, as if she knew that I had been forewarned of her husband's dislike to her friend, hastened to say—

"I am sure you and Mademoiselle Monti will get on admirably together, Caroline; for you have been so much in her beautiful native land—a delight hitherto denied to me (here her eye rested for a moment on Lord Tintern)—that you will at once have an interesting mutual subject of conversation. Dear Francesca and I have contrived to become very fond of each other, notwithstanding—have not we, dear?" And Augusta bowed her fair head till her lips touched the forehead of the Italian girl.

I knew not whether Lady Tintern did this out of defiance, or merely because in any fresh attitude she seemed to appear to such advantage (I acquitted her without hesitation of the weakness of being actuated by a genuine feeling of affection); but any further demonstrations of attachment were suspended for the time by Edward's suggestion, that perhaps we should like to be shown to our rooms.

"Where is your darling boy, Caroline?" asked Augusta, looking round.

"Your nurse has already taken mine up-stairs, thank you, Augusta," I returned; "but I shall be very glad to show him to you, and you must let me see your baby."

"Ay, to be sure, let them be brought down," said Lord Tintern; "and then, Augusta, Arthur, and I shall be favoured as well as yourselves."

The children were sent for; and certainly, when they made their appearance together, no one could have failed to be struck with the contrast between the two. There was my boy in all the unconscious pride of health and infantine beauty—there was Augusta's girl, pale, puny, and sickly, and about half his size.

Almost simultaneous with the entrance of the babies was that of Captain Spencer, who had just arrived, and, with the familiarity of old acquaintanceship, proceeded to the drawing-room without waiting to be announced.

"Ha! what have we here?" he asked, as he shook hands with each of us. "Really, the sight of these little creatures makes one feel that one is getting as ancient as one's temporaries;" and he shrugged his shoulders slightly, rather bored by the company in which he found himself. "Lady Tintern, how well you are looking! I wish I could say as much for Edward."

Augusta scarcely heard him; for she was about to take the youthful Arthur from his nurse's arms, when Mademoiselle Monti, who but just before had been at the further end of the room, stood by her side, and insisted on her prior claim, because, she said, she was such a devoted lover of babies. Augusta playfully resisted her; but, observing a sad smile on Captain Spencer's lips, and even on Arthur's, she abandoned the struggle, and, appealing to the former, said to him in an enthusiastic manner if the boy was not the living image of his father?

"Indeed, I never can pretend to see likenesses in very juvenile specimens," returned Captain Spencer; "he looks a very fine, strong child, as far as I can venture to give an opinion." He looked at me, and again addressed Augusta—"Though I have had the pleasure of knowing you for a good many years, Lady Tintern, I never before that you were so loving where babies were concerned. But it is a charming thing to see young and beautiful women so fond of children!"

Not on any previous occasion had he ventured to speak so tauntingly to Augusta in the presence of her husband, and he did not think he would ever repeat the experiment, when he saw the indignant look which Lord Tintern cast upon him as he said—

"It is quite possible, Spencer, that Lady Tintern may be possessed of many good and excellent qualities, of which you are totally ignorant. Augusta, my love, I think our guests had better be shown to their rooms, if you please; I will say, Laura and your brother Frank will be here in half an hour."

I felt quite angry with Captain Spencer for his unprovoked attack on one whom he knew to be to a certain extent in power, and I answered some indifferent remark he made to me as coldly as I could. But I soon found how entirely my sympathy with the injured Augusta was thrown away;

as Captain Spencer followed us, I heard him half-whisper to her—

"So that dear little saint, your sister-in-law, is coming, is she? I declare I am over head and ears in love with her already."

And Augusta's reply was—"As a friend, I should advise you not to let your admiration carry you too far; for I suspect that Lady Laura, with all her saintliness, would scarcely refuse the irresistible Captain Spencer!"

"She can take care of herself," thought I; "that is quite clear, at all events!"

Lady Tintern conducted me into her nursery, closely followed by Mademoiselle Monti, who seemed resolved not to lose sight of her friend for an instant, if she could possibly help it. I watched the cold and glassy eye, ever fixed upon the ground, and yet observing all so keenly;—I marked the stealthy and noiseless footstep, which brought her to your side, when you were perhaps unconscious of her presence in the room; and I felt how surely I should have disliked and avoided her, even if I had not heard Maria Salvi's tale, or known of Lord Tintern's "prejudice." As it was, however, I thought I would not altogether shun her, as, by conversing with her, I might elicit some particulars that would assist Mr. Deloraine in his search after the missing one.

The Swiss nurse could speak but little English, and my boy's attendant was somewhat disconcerted at finding herself among so many foreigners. Françoise was the best English scholar of the three, and she was acting as interpreter.

"It was so provoking of dear Edward!" said Augusta to me. "You would hardly believe it, but he actually refused to allow me to engage the most charming French *bonne* that you ever saw, because he would not have a Catholic—a *Roman* Catholic, as he would beg me to call it—about his children, as if it could matter! Fortunately, however, dear Mademoiselle Monti found this Swiss who, it seems, is a Protestant; and I am in hopes that her accent is tolerable, as she has spent some years in Paris. I really believe, Francesca, that Lord Tintern did not half like my having a French maid." Here, seeing me glance, astonished, at the servants, she added—"Oh! they don't understand me."

"*Carissima!*" murmured the Italian, as she laid her hand

on her friend's shoulder ; " in England it appears that you are obliged to obey your husbands. Happy they who, like Lady Tintern, are blessed with so adoring, so amiable a lord."

" Dear creature, that is so like you—never harbouring a malicious thought—so unmindful of yourself!"—and she pressed Francesca's hand.

I had shuddered in the drawing-room at seeing my baby in the Italian's arms ; and now, as she pressed him tightly to her bosom, and loaded him with caresses and endearments it was almost more than I could bear. I inwardly blessed the child for screaming the whole time she held him, and becoming good again when surrendered to Agnes. Francesca proceeded to hug the infant Augusta, declaring that her darling pet should never, never be superseded in her affections. I could not resist saying—" I think I have heard Mademoiselle Monti, of your having a charming little nephew, to whom you are extremely attached."

I must have infused a tone of bitterness into this commonplace remark, for I might in a hundred ways have heard of Lady Tintern's friend having a nephew ; but she gave me such a look ! only for an instant, it is true, but whole volumes of hatred and defiance were concentrated in it, and from that time forth Francesca Monti was my deadly—though long unacknowledged—foe. A moment more, and she was smiling blandly, and was going to answer me, when Augusta's nurse, who had been waiting for opportunity to speak, said, that she thought the doctor ought to see the baby that evening. The child looked fearful and delicate ; and was harassed by a constant cough.

" Poor little dear !" said the mother ; " to be sure, nurse, mind you send for him—there's a good creature. Hélène (to her own maid), I forgot to tell you that I wished the new Valenciennes tacked on to my sleeves for dinner to-day and my small turquoise brooch I shall also wear."

" *Oui, Madame !*" returned the obsequious attendant, as we all left the room together—Augusta declaring that she was miserable about the child, and should know no peace till Mr. Bromwich had seen it—and Francesca comforted her, by assuring her that she had had some experience of these matters, and was convinced that the ailment was very trifling.

I took my cousin with me to my room, and was at

madverting severely upon Augusta's ill conduct as a wife, and heartlessness as a mother, and was just proceeding to speak of Francesca, when a light tap was heard at the door, and on my saying "Come in!" Lady Laura appeared. Her face brightened as she greeted us, but I soon perceived that she was not very cheerful. We chatted away till it was time to dress for dinner.

When I was about half-way through that operation, I was seized with a sudden faintness and giddiness, and was obliged to lie down. Arthur was really frightened, and would not hear of my leaving my room that evening; and, when Mr. Bromwich came, he found that he had two patients instead of one. He pronounced the baby to be in a very unsatisfactory state, though in no immediate danger, and blamed the nurse for not having earlier represented to her lady the necessity of sending for him. He thought me unwell, but that a few days' quiet, and remaining in my own apartment, with a little of his doctoring, would soon restore me. I obeyed his orders, and did not join the circle at dinner till the day after Christmas-day.

CHAPTER XXV.

LITTLE Augusta was decidedly a great deal better already to the no small relief and thankfulness of her father, who had been miserable about her, more so, probably, than she had been any real occasion for. Frank Sutherland and Henry Mordaunt had arrived, and we all sat down in very good spirits; all at least displaying the external signs of them, for Laura was not happy at heart. Captain Spencer was extremely attentive to her, and threw out various hints as to the possibility of his becoming some day a better man than he had hitherto been, if he could prevail on some lady to take compassion on him, and rescue him from his forlorn condition as a bachelor. In such nothings, the conversation at dinner passed off till the ladies retired.

In the drawing-room Lady Tintern insisted on wheeling a sofa close to the fire for my especial benefit, observing that I must not overdo myself at first; and, assisted by Mademoiselle Monti, she arranged the cushions for me, and covered me in a shawl. I was tired, and glad to rest, but I was not disposed to sleep; and Francesca, seeing that I approached me as soon as Augusta and Laura had adjourned to their own apartments.

"Mrs. Mildmay Vernon," she said, with the least possible foreign accent, and in the lowest tone of a naturally low voice—"Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, I am delighted to think that you are so much better. You were so kind the other day as to inquire for one *very* dear to me—my darling nephew. I rejoice to say that he and his father are both quite well. I left them in London only last week, to avail myself of Lady Tintern's invitation."

I was amazed at Francesca's thus voluntarily introducing a subject which must be so hateful to her, and so full of

reproach, if she had the least spark of humanity in her. I answered, that I was very glad to hear it, and most incautiously added—"The little fellow has lost his mother, has he not?"

This question of course confirmed the suspicion she had previously entertained, of my knowing something of their family history, and at once reduced it to a certainty.

"Alas! yes," she replied; "so young, so fair, but so—you were perhaps acquainted with the late Marchesa Monti?"

"No, not at all, but I have heard her name. She was a Miss Protheroe, and excited a considerable sensation in Florence by her beauty and winning manners, did she not?"

"You have been rightly informed," returned Mademoiselle Monti. "She was one who, had the qualities of her heart and mind corresponded with the charms of her outward bearing, would have been perfection indeed. But I am saying more than I intended, though to a friend of Lady Tintern's I can hardly feel as a stranger. None loved her as I did," she continued, and passed her hand across her eyes with so well-feigned an air of deep emotion that it was difficult to believe it unreal—"none, at least, except her husband, whose heart is broken." Then, resuming a calmer tone—"You are probably aware that my sister-in-law was hopelessly insane for some time before her death?"

"Yes!" I replied, looking fixedly at her.

"And may I ask," she rejoined, returning my gaze with equal steadiness, "what friend of the Marchesa's has given you these details of her married life?"

Thus was I completely entrapped by my wily antagonist; for what could be more natural than her question, or what reason could I assign for declining to answer it? And all the while I had fancied that I was manœuvring so dexterously, to surprise *her* into some incautious expression, or draw from her some sign of horror or remorse. But I was not easily cast down or discomfited; so, after an instant's hesitation, I said—"I am afraid I must not tell you, Mademoiselle Monti."

"Indeed!" with an air of polite surprise—"then, dear Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, I could almost wish we had not spoken at all on a topic that ever revives so many painful associations in my mind; for your refusal only gives me an

additional proof of the reluctance of those who were once the friends of that fair young creature, to acknowledge themselves as such during the later part of her career."

Here she had nearly made me betray myself again by exciting my just indignation at her perfidy; but I restrained myself, and said, coldly—"Indeed, Mademoiselle Monti, I must beg that you will not put so erroneous a construction upon my words."

And it was a relief to us both when, at this awkward crisis, the door was opened by Augusta, who was followed by her sister-in-law.

The evening was divided between music and conversation. I was not sufficiently recovered to contribute my usual share of the former, and I remained upon my sofa. I observed that Henry talked and laughed with Lady Laura with all the freedom of long acquaintance; and I observed, too, that there was a slight restraint in her manner towards him. But though I compassionated the sufferings she was enduring, I had no fears for this fine young creature, whose resolution I knew to be no less strong than her heart was affectionate; and I felt that she was not one to pine away, the victim of an unrequited attachment, but that she would put forth her best efforts to subdue it, and, sooner or later, would be successful. She had evidently been deceived by Mordaunt's friendly and cordial manner into the belief that he entertained a deeper feeling of regard for her; and, since she had heard of his attachment to my cousin, she had learnt to view it in its true light.

Lord Tintern talked to Agnes, Captain Spencer chiefly to me, and my husband to Augusta. Francesca sat apart in a corner, engaged on an elaborate piece of work for the decoration of her friend's drawing-room—that friend, by whom she appeared, somewhat forgotten this evening, probably from the former being so agreeably occupied. Without seeming to do so, Mademoiselle Monti was observing and taking in all that was passing before her, and doubtless revolving in her mind how she should best turn every thing to her own advantage. Once, looking round at her suddenly, I caught her eye fixed upon mine, and I read in it even more of hatred and defiance than in the glance which she had bestowed upon me a few days before.

Averting mine, it rested upon my husband and Augusta,

who was pointing to the turquoise brooch, which I had heard her tell her maid that she intended to wear the first night of our arrival. It was quite a small, unpretending ornament, as I could see now that my attention was thus called to it, and I was rather surprised at Lady Tintern's condescending to wear it, instead of one of the many beautiful costly brooches which I knew her to possess. But I watched them; and the mystery, I thought, was solved, when I saw that Arthur smiled, and that she regarded him for a few seconds with a tender melancholy gaze, that reminded me of the time before my marriage and her engagement. I immediately surmised that the trinket had been a gift of Arthur's; but for once I resolved that I would not be rash or impetuous, and would wait quietly till I could ascertain the particulars of their conversation.

When we retired, my husband asked me so kindly—so affectionately—whether I was feeling weary, that I was completely disarmed; and, embracing him fondly, I wondered how a cloud could ever dim so true and warm a love as our's. I told him what had taken place that evening between Mademoiselle Monti and myself; but, to my surprise and disappointment, I found that he did not enter half so warmly as I did into the affair—indeed, he even suggested the possibility of Maria Salvi having greatly exaggerated, and of Francesca being innocent; adding, "That it was never fair to judge from hearing only one side of a story."

Had Arthur, like myself, had the narration from Maria's own lips, instead of second-hand through me, he would probably have been entirely of my opinion; for the language of truth is rarely to be mistaken, and carries conviction with it. But a history, repeated by another, loses half its force, and is received with something of doubtfulness, which is not altogether unreasonable. However, I did not stay to consider all this; but, angry at my husband's differing from me on a subject in which I was so greatly interested, and vexed at being opposed, I exclaimed—

"This is always the way now, Arthur! I am always wrong in your eyes! I suppose Lady Tintern has been eulogizing her friend; but praise from her deceitful lips would rather set me against any one than dispose me to like them. And may I venture to ask, if you please, what was the meaning of that flirtation about a little trumpery brooch? It was

very pretty and touching, I have no doubt, but quite incomprehensible to me!"

"Caroline," said Arthur passionately, "your fierce, jealous temper is growing perfectly unbearable, and will soon wear me to death unless I can quench it. But I will try, however; and, if I don't succeed, I shall still have the resource of absenting myself from you whenever I can. Lady Tintern, with all her faults, has not that accursed one; she is as beautiful as yourself, and has not your dreadful tongue."

My fury transported me beyond all bounds. "Very well!" I rejoined; "I can and I *will* be revenged! You intend to excite my jealousy—I don't pretend to deny that you have it in your power, but we will see if I cannot awaken yours. I will not be a slave to any man alive—I was not born a Vernon for nothing!"

"We will cease this idle and useless conversation, if you please," observed Arthur; "only remember, Caroline, that if you did once succeed in arousing my jealousy, as you call it, one or both of us should repent it to our dying day!"

And he refused to utter another word, remaining obstinately silent. I slept little, for I was really unhappy. I had serious thoughts of declining to appear at breakfast, but I fancied that my absence would give my rival (as I no longer hesitated to consider Augusta) a great advantage over me and I resolved that, if I could avoid it, I would never afford her and Captain Vernon the opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* during the remainder of our visit, which I intended to curtail as much as possible.

Lord Tintern had been accustomed before his marriage to breakfast at nine o'clock, the usual hour at Hartley Grange; but, to please his wife, he had altered it to ten. However she could not or would not descend till nearly eleven; so her husband, after vainly contesting the point for some time and representing, in his gentle manner, that his day was too fully occupied to admit of his sacrificing so much of it, had at length arranged to breakfast by himself in his study. But, if not particularly busy, he came in at the second repast, and saw that his guests were made comfortable, and conversed with them for a few minutes. Augusta was more than commonly late this morning—indeed, I believe it was half-past eleven before she appeared among us; but she

had sent word down by Mademoiselle Monti to beg that we would not wait for her. After delivering her message, that young lady went to the head of the table, and began to make the tea, saying that Lady Tintern had asked her to do so. We all thought this a most extraordinary proceeding; and I saw that Laura felt the slight. However, she took no sort of notice; but when her brother entered, and perceived Francesca seated in the place of his wife, and doing the honours, his brow became dark as night. With politeness, but with great decision, he addressed her—

“Mademoiselle Monti, my sister will relieve you of the labour so needlessly imposed upon you. Laura, dear, will you oblige me by presiding until Augusta is ready?”

Laura looked uncomfortable; but Mademoiselle Monti had glided from her chair almost before the words had escaped Lord Tintern’s lips, and she said, apologetically, that Lady Tintern had requested her to make the breakfast, to spare dear Lady Laura the trouble.

“Lady Laura will not mind the trouble, I am sure,” he rejoined; and, taking his sister’s hand, he led her to the seat which he begged she would always occupy in the absence of her sister-in-law, and left the room; while I cast a triumphant glance at Arthur, at this fresh proof of Lady Tintern’s ill-conduct.

The little scene I have related threw a restraint over the assembled party, and an awkward silence prevailed, occasionally broken by one of us trying to say something in a natural manner, as if nothing had occurred. In this uncomfortable state Augusta found us; and though, as we afterwards learned, she had just had an interview with her husband, she looked at his sister with well-feigned surprise, and said—

“I had asked Francesca to spare you that trouble, dear Laura; for I don’t think it is an office that you particularly enjoy, and she is always ready to do for others. But so are you,” kissing her forehead.

Laura had resigned her post directly Lady Tintern appeared, and only answered—“I came here at Edward’s special request, Augusta.”

When the latter sat down, I saw that she had again put on the turquoise brooch, and I began to suspect that she had worn it each day while I had been confined to my room.

Lord Tintern fetched Arthur immediately after breakfast,

and they went out together, without my having the opportunity of asking him any further questions, which he would most likely have declined to answer, after the extreme provocation I had given him the night before. Captain Spencer had gone to a coursing meeting in the neighbourhood, accompanied by young Mordaunt and Mr. Sutherland; and we ladies were left to pass the morning as best pleased us. I meant to pass it in my chamber, and had provided myself with a Dante; but Agnes and Laura pressed me to join them in the drawing-room, saying, that Lady Tintern had announced her intention of driving Mademoiselle Monti in her own pony-chaise to see the coursing.

"Laura," I said, "how *did* your sister-in-law become acquainted with that dreadful Italian girl?"

"I hardly know," replied Laura, "for Augusta is very mysterious about the whole affair; and when I asked her that very question (couched in more polite terms), soon after my arrival, she assumed an offended air—said she was sorry her husband had thought it worth his while to prejudice me against one to whom she was so tenderly attached—and murmured something about Captain Spencer and Mr. Deloraine. Augusta is not generally ill-natured—far from it," continued Laura; "but, as you are both aware, there are special reasons for her disliking me, alas!"

"I don't know what you call ill-natured," I returned: "surely you cannot say she is very obliging to her husband, or why does she persist in taking to her bosom that viper whom he detests, because he sees through the veil she has so artfully thrown over her real character?"

"Augusta is extremely high-spirited," remarked Lady Laura; "she was a spoilt child by her own confession, and she cannot bear to be thwarted in any whim or caprice. Besides, Mademoiselle Monti is of use to her in many little ways; and, if the truth must be told, she is always ready to flatter her vanity."

"Well," I continued, "if you exonerate her there, what do you say to her driving out now, when I heard your brother tell her last evening that he had an engagement which must take him from home early this morning, and prevent his seeing Mr. Bromwich, and therefore he particularly begged her not to leave the house till she had heard the doctor's report of the baby. *My* husband was standing near,

so she thought fit to answer, that it was most unkind of her dearest Edward to consider it necessary to mention such a matter of course. Truly, her good-nature is especially striking towards her husband and her child!"

I paused; for, in the bitterness of my feelings, I had said more than I intended. Laura looked up at me quickly. "Why, you don't think that *now*"—she began.

Agnes came to my assistance. "I think," she observed, "that Lady Tintern has always been especially anxious to stand well in the opinion of both my cousins."

Françoise now appeared, saying that *Helène* was busy dressing her lady, who had commissioned her to give her love to Lady Laura, and ask her to be so kind as to see Mr. Bromwich when he called. The young aunt loved her little niece most sincerely; but she had no wish to usurp the mother's place, even when that unnatural mother begged her to do so; and, though she returned a message of acquiescence in Lady Tintern's request, I could see that her eyes filled with tears. No wonder that her heart bled for her beloved brother and his child; though as yet she knew not the worst—that was yet to be revealed. To divert her thoughts, Agnes asked me to sing. I complied; and when the two friends proposed taking a walk round the house, where they would be sure to see the doctor's approach, I went to my room, not without experiencing a pang at feeling that Agnes was more dear to Laura than I was, and possessed her confidence more fully. Yet I did not doubt Laura's affection for me; but though my beauty (surely now I may speak thus without vanity) might cause me to be more admired and courted by the other sex, how could any woman love me as she would love Agnes? the one, so proud and imperious—the other, so gentle and unselfish!

On my way I encountered *Françoise* carrying my boy. She curtsied respectfully, and told me that she had taken the child while his nurse was preparing for a walk. Then, for the first time, it flashed across me—"Surely that woman is the *Adèle* of Maria's story."

I took the baby from her arms, saying I would have him till his own nurse was ready for him; and, as she walked away, I observed her attentively; and her shrewd and cunning face, and a sort of distrustful air that pervaded her, confirmed me in the truth of my supposition. The baby

was fast asleep, and I thought I would go and saunter in the hall till the nurse should join me. To reach it, I had to pass along the passage in which was Lady Tintern's room; and, hearing voices, I concluded that the friends were both there, adorning for their drive. My approach was evidently unknown to them; for, although the door was partially open, the conversation was uninterrupted, and Francesca was speaking in a tone so unusually loud for her, that, without pausing, I could not avoid hearing the following words uttered in the most emphatic manner—

“He loves you, Augusta! I know it—I feel it!”

I stopped as if struck by lightning, for the first impulse was all but irresistible; but, with all the electric rapidity of thought, I remembered that I was doing that which had ever held in horror and contempt. Then the tempest whispered—

“But you know that the subject of their conversational interests and concerns you most nearly—you know that they are saying what they have no right to say—that a false and evil woman, but a syren, dangerous through the charms of her extraordinary beauty, is doing her utmost to tear from you the love of him who is dearer to you than life—your own husband! Surely there is no sin in your listening now that you may endeavour to defeat their machinations.”

And thus attacking one master passion of my mind—jealousy, the tempter triumphed over the other—pride, which in this instance did not “save me from falling.” I did not attempt to offer the slightest palliation for a meanness which nothing could have induced me to suppose myself capable of. I can only acknowledge, with shame and remorse that I was guilty of it.

And what did I see and hear? Through the chink, where the door was fastened by its hinges to the wall, I could discern Augusta reclining in a most luxurious easy-chair while the Italian stood before her with upraised arm, and eyes flashing with pretended enthusiasm, to which her voice and words well responded.

“He loves you!” she repeated; “I see it in every glance of his bright eye. I hear it in every tone of his noble voice. He loves you, Augusta, and he is worthy of the passion which he has inspired in you. Think not that I am deceiving you, my cherished friend. Heaven forbid that I should!”

"Ah, Francesca, Francesca!" returned Augusta, covering her face with her hands, through which trickled the tears of real, though misplaced, emotion; "do not trifle with me! You do not—cannot—know, how for years—ay, from the merest girl—how blindly, how madly I have doated on that man! I would gladly have died for him; or, could he have lived for me, I would thankfully have forsaken wealth, or grandeur, or the triumphs of gratified vanity, and gone with him into the deepest seclusion, or to the remotest land. I could not altogether hide my weakness from him, and why was he alone able to resist me? But he never cared for me; and now his whole soul is bound up in that beautiful, detestable woman. I see her glory in my discomfiture—I see her exult in the possession of a heart which, but once to have called mine, I would have sacrificed all that this world could bestow; and now—Oh! when shall I be released from a life so hateful to me, so insupportable—since he would not be one iota less gay or less happy were I to die this very hour!" And the vain, worldly-minded Lady Tintern, in the extremity of her anguish, wept aloud.

Then the Italian knelt by her chair, and took her hand, and pressed it to her lips, and bathed it with the tears which she could so readily command. "But why all this bitter grief, *carissima*? Banish all these doubts and fears, and believe me when I assure you of his love."

"*You* assure me!" interrupted Augusta proudly, and raising her head as she spoke; "what should *you* know of it? Come, Francesca, let me shake off this folly, and tell Helène to come and dress me."

The girl stood silent and motionless for a few seconds; after which she spoke so softly, that I could with difficulty catch her words, though I strained my utmost attention.

"Forgive me, dearest lady, if, in my zeal for your happiness, I have gone too far. Had I dared, I had earnestly wished to mention a little circumstance—but no matter—Lady Tintern's strength of mind will ere long enable her to subdue this affection."

"Never! never!" cried Augusta, impetuously. "Francesca, I implore you, torment me not—tell me what you mean!"

"Be calm, my sweet friend, or I shall not have the courage. You must know that, as I passed the door of

Captain Mildmay Vernon's dressing-room this morning immediately after breakfast, the said door being carelessly left open (how little they thought this was the case now.) I heard a sound as of deep sighing, which evidently issued from that apartment, and, fearing that some one was ill or suffering, I peeped in ; but, instead of one of the servants as I had imagined, I beheld Captain Vernon seated at his writing-table, one elbow resting upon it, while the other hand held a note, which he was reading with the greatest attention. Once, as he proceeded, I heard a half-stifled sob, and from the depths of his heart burst forth these words—“She loves me still! I know she does! Her heart has never wandered from its allegiance since the hour that she penned these lines. Oh! why are we not united and happy? But I have only my own accursed folly to thank for all this misery!” and I saw him kiss the letter—not once, or twice, but repeatedly—and replace it carefully in the inner drawer of his desk. And whose handwriting do you think it was, Augusta, that thus moved him? It was *your own!*”

Lady Tintern started up with a wild cry of joy, exclaiming—“Gracious Heaven! is it really so? Is not such happiness too ecstatic for me to believe? Then he has loved me—still loves me, perhaps—though, when he made the discovery, he was too far compromised to retreat from his odious engagement. But, Francesca, how can you be sure that the note he kissed was mine?”

“I will tell you,” replied Mademoiselle Monti; “though, in doing so, I must make a small confession which will perhaps shock you. After the scene I thus witnessed, I heard Lord Tintern's voice on the stairs calling to Captain Mildmay Vernon to make haste, or they should be late at Beechley. When the room was vacated, thinking of my beloved friend, I could not resist the strong desire I felt to know the truth which I already suspected. I went in—my hand trembled, I own—but I opened the drawer, took out the note, and, recognising your hand, I looked only at the signature—‘Augusta Sutherland’—and instantly replaced it without reading another word.”

I must do Lady Tintern the justice to say that for a minute she looked annoyed. Francesca perceived this, and added, in a crestfallen style—

“I see how it is, Lady Tintern; you are displeased with

your poor friend. But, remember, I could have no personal interest in the matter; my fault, as you consider it, was committed in your service."

"My darling Francesca!" returned her companion, throwing her arm round her; "I am too happy, I assure you, to quarrel with the means that have rendered me so. My gratitude to you shall be proved some day more substantially than by words."

"Only by the lasting possession of your friendship—I ask no more!" said the Italian, passionately.

A short silence followed, during which Augusta seemed absorbed in the contemplation of her newly-discovered bliss. But her beautiful countenance, just before so radiant, was clouded in an instant by one of those sudden blights to which it was subject, and she said—

"How dreadful it is to be so surrounded by spies! There is that fierce Caroline, who would be ready to stab or poison her husband if he excited her jealousy in the least; and there is that odious Lady Laura, who would be just as ready to tear my eyes out for indulging in the most harmless flirtation, pretending it was all for love of her brother."

"Lord Tintern is not suspicious," Francesca said, more as if asking a question than asserting a fact.

"No," said Augusta, with a sort of shudder. "But, oh! Francesca, what if it should be really true—as Laura, and others like her, declare—that it is an unpardonable sin in a wife to love one who is not her husband? What if the indulgence of such a feeling, however innocent it might once have been, should now plunge me into perdition?"

"Believe it not!" returned her companion. "In my country love owns no restraints, no laws; is independent of external forms and artificial ties; and, by the deep passion of its own exalted nature, triumphs over all human obstacles."

"But then," pursued Augusta, "your religion has consolations for the expiring victim of remorse, which ours does not acknowledge. With you the vilest sinners may receive absolution from the lips of their confessor, and deem themselves as secure of escaping hell, and obtaining heaven, as the holiest saints. With us it is not so; and even the most reckless among us—and I have never been over squeamish—must think twice before"——

"I cannot meet you on these grounds, Lady Tintern:

I can only ask you whether, for the sake of these visionary scruples, you can resolve to renounce all that this world has to offer of love and joy?"

"My head aches," was Augusta's reply: "we will go out now, dear Francesca, and talk more on these things another time."

CHAPTER XXVI.

I HAVE no clear recollection of what followed this. Even now I cannot recall who relieved me of the sleeping infant, or how I reached my own room ; and it was more than an hour before I was at all myself again, or could in the least realize my dreadful position.

To love as I loved, with that intensity and fervour which left room but for one other affection in my heart—and that other, for *his* child ; to have thought less of my God than my husband—of Heaven than of the earthly paradise we had shared together : and in a moment, at one fell swoop, to see all my happiness snatched from me for ever—to feel the foundation of all my joys crumbling away from beneath me—and, worse than all, to know that my soul's idol was basely and systematically deceiving me : these were the crushing, overwhelming convictions that greeted my return to consciousness. In my despair I rose from the bed, cast myself on my knees, and groaned aloud. Now was the beginning of my misery—there was a bitterer cup yet reserved for me than this, which was in part imaginary ; but in mercy, or in judgment—who shall say which?—it was as yet hidden from me.

About half an hour I spent in this state of utter, hopeless woe, till a bright gleam flashed across me. Might not Francesca have been herself mistaken, or might she not have been intentionally deceiving ? It was difficult to imagine her motive for acting thus ; yet I felt so certain of having made her my enemy, that I thought, to a disposition like hers, the desire of revenge might account for what was in itself so inexplicable. Long afterwards I learned that my surmise was partly correct, but that a yet stronger reason operated upon her—she was aiming at getting Lady Tintern into her

power, by a pretended wish to serve her, that she might compel Augusta to befriend and protect her, should the storm, which she already saw lowering in the distance, burst over her head.

My first impulse was to examine Arthur's papers. I ran into his dressing-room, into which a door opened from our own apartment—but found the desk locked. This showed me that my husband must have bethought himself that it would be wisest to come up-stairs again, and secure it from the possible scrutiny of his wife. And so my worst suspicions were all but confirmed, but a very faint shadow of doubt or hope remained in my mind; and, endeavouring to maintain my partially restored calmness, I set myself to consider how I should act in my present circumstances.

Reveal the whole to Arthur? How could I acknowledge to one who had ever felt and expressed the greatest horror of any thing approaching to meanness or deceit—how could I acknowledge to him, that I had been guilty of listening to a long conversation, the subject of which was the crimination of my husband? Supposing the whole story to be a fabrication, should I not forfeit his esteem and confidence—if not his affection—by the avowal of my baseness, and of my credulity in allowing myself to entertain such injurious ideas regarding him? Or, should it be indeed as I feared, even then I shrank from the confession of a treachery which my inmost soul abhorred. And might not Arthur turn round upon me, and say—"I cannot have been guilty of any sin much worse than your's; you have opened my eyes to your real character, and almost justified my treason towards you." No, no, I must be silent—I must bear all sooner than acknowledge my error.

I had reached this point in my reflections, when a gentle tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Agnes.

"How are you now, dear Caroline? We peeped in some time ago, and found you lying down; and, as you did not speak, we concluded you were asleep. I was quite glad to see it, for you looked extremely tired this morning, as if you had rested very little in the night."

Her soft, low voice sounded in my ears like a message of peace; and, for a moment, I felt tempted to make her the confidante of my sins and sorrows, and ask her advice in my

overwhelming difficulty. Would that I had done so! I might have been spared much after misery. But the feeling passed quickly away; and I said hurriedly—

"No, I have not been asleep, though I did not hear you before. Where is Laura?"

"She is gone to speak to Mr. Bromwich. In compliance with your wish, I have been telling her what you had told me of Mademoiselle Salvi's story."

I had asked Agnes to do so that very morning; thinking that, as the intimacy between Lady Tintern and Mademoiselle Monti was becoming so very great, it was only right to set Laura on her guard, and my cousin had been quite of my opinion. I had told Agnes as much as I could without betraying Mr. Willis's confidence; that part of the history, as I have before said, I had revealed only to Arthur.

"And what did Laura say?" I asked, eagerly.

Agnes looked at me for an instant, evidently surprised at the agitation which I could not suppress; but she only took my hand, and answered—"I think she was more shocked than astonished, for she was entirely convinced of the truth of Mademoiselle Salvi's narration."

"Well she might be!" was my involuntary exclamation: "the wretch—the monster!"

"We must not utterly condemn Mademoiselle Monti without hearing her defence," observed my cousin; "though I own I have seldom conceived so strong a prejudice against any one."

"Agnes you know little, or nothing, and I may not tell you more—if I might, you would be compelled to acknowledge, with all your charity, that hell itself cannot be peopled with worse fiends than she. I will leave this accursed house to-morrow," I continued, vehemently; "if I leave it alone, I will go! I will stay no longer in this abode of guilt and wretchedness!"

Agnes must have supposed that my senses were forsaking me. She entreated me to be calm, saying that she would accompany me, if I persisted in my intention; but she hoped I would consider it again before acting upon it, as my sudden and unaccountable departure would excite uncomfortable suspicions, and give rise to disagreeable remarks.

"True," I answered, "my pride shall sustain me; I will never forget that I am a Vernon! Agnes, you have some

of the blood in your veins, and that is why I cannot understand your being always so humble and quiet."

Agnes smiled: perhaps she was thinking of the time when I refused to own her as being in any way connected with the Vernons; or perhaps she was struck with the very superficial notion I entertained of the true meaning of pride or humility.

"You must remember, dear Caroline," she said, "that the circumstances of my early life were calculated to make me sad and thoughtful beyond my years; and early impressions are often lasting, though the cause of sorrow may be removed. Thanks, first to my uncle's kindness, and since to your's, I have only the memory of grief to sober me now."

I cast my arms round her neck, and wept freely. I was beginning to love Agnes; and oh! how I longed to open my heart to her! Yet I dared not. I valued her esteem too highly to run the risk of forfeiting it. But I mistook her: she, of all others, would have been the most ready to construe my errors charitably, and make allowance for me. Often, when I have heard persons vehemently running down those against whom I knew them to have some feeling of pique or dislike, harshly censuring their lightest faults or weaknesses, as though strong in the absence of any such in themselves, I have asked myself—Is this the saint's righteous indignation against sin, or the Pharisee's bitter condemnation of the sinner? So good, so true herself, Agnes could afford to be merciful to her fellow-creatures, and could believe that their failings were at least as pardonable as her own. She could hear a pretty girl extolled for her beauty, without immediately adding some qualifying remark, or descanting upon the worthlessness of personal attractions: she could join in these praises without a secret, gnawing feeling of envy at her heart; she could cast a veil over an error or act of folly in another, without coming pointedly forward as a champion—and she could bear to be less noticed or attended to than girls more rich than she in external charms.

And let not these signs of a noble and amiable disposition be underrated. A woman's sphere is small and confined, and the love of admiration and approbation is incorporated, as it were, in her very nature.

These qualities I had yet fully to discover in Agnes, but I

was beginning to have some dim perception of them ; and this, joined to her last generous and unmerited speech, emboldened me to give way before her to that emotion which I must conceal from all others. I had yet to learn that she was capable of higher things than these—or rather, that they were the tokens of a lofty spirit, which could forgive the greatest injury no less than it was mindful of the smallest kindness.

My cousin returned my embrace in silence, unwilling to intrude upon my unknown grief. After a few minutes freely given to its indulgence, I dried my eyes, and said—

“ You are right, Agnes, I must avoid exciting remark ; but stay here I cannot and will not, and if you knew why, you would say I was right also.”

I stopped, as Agnes motioned to me that we were no longer alone. Lady Laura stood by my side.

“ Is Mr. Bromwich gone ? ” I inquired, with as much self-possession as I could command.

“ Just gone,” returned Laura. “ He says that little Augusta has nearly got rid of what was troubling her, but that she promises to be an extremely delicate child, and one that will require unremitting attention in rearing.”

“ Which from her mother she will never receive,” I interposed, malignantly.

“ But the dear child’s father will see that all is done for her, as far as it is in his power,” said Laura.

And she changed the subject ; and we talked in a desultory sort of way, all striving to appear in better spirits than we really were, till the sound of horses’ hoofs, followed by the voices of Lord Tintern and Arthur, was heard under the window. I went into the drawing-room with my companions, not being prepared for a *tête-à-tête* interview with my husband. I did not speak to him when he entered ; and, when he addressed some trifling question to me, I answered shortly and coldly.

“ Where is Augusta ? ” were Lord Tintern’s first words.

“ She is out driving,” returned his sister.

“ Then Mr. Bromwich came early,” he continued ; “ and did Augusta tell you what he said, Laura ? ”

“ Mr. Bromwich thought baby much better,” replied she, evasively ; “ but he said she would require great care and attention for a long time to come.”

"Ay, so I feared," observed Edward, sadly. "Did Augusta and Mademoiselle Monti go out directly after Mr. Bromwich's visit?"

"Augusta sent word to ask me to see Mr. Bromwich for her," said Laura, with reluctance and hesitation. "She thought you would be satisfied with my report."

A look of deep sorrow and mortification, not unmixed with anger, overspread the quiet, placid face of Lord Tintern; and, at this instant, his wife's voice was heard on the stairs, and her musical laugh rang clear and joyous through the hall. She addressed her husband immediately; told him they had had a charming drive, and hoped he was not bored to death with that troublesome magistrate's business. But he left the room without answering her. The proud beauty bit her lip, and tried to look scornful; but for once she did not altogether succeed.

"Laura, Laura!" she said, with an affected laugh, "I am afraid you have been dwelling on my sins, and shocking your brother with some eloquent description of my wickedness."

"Ah! dear Lady Tintern," interposed Francesca, in an audible whisper; "why would you persist in driving me out to-day, when I told you there were others who"—

"Edward is but just come in, Augusta," said Laura, without taking the slightest notice of Mademoiselle Monti's insinuation; "and I really should have hoped that you knew me too well (to say nothing of your husband) to suppose that I should have either the arrogance or the inclination to make your sins, as you call them, the subject of our conversation."

And Laura wept away, and Agnes and Arthur followed her example, having no wish to hear any more polite squabbling; but I was curious to witness the discomfiture of my rival.

"Dear Caroline," said Lady Tintern, laying her hand on my shoulder, "you must not allow yourself to be prejudiced against me, even though your friendship for Lady Laura is so great. You know that she and her brother have been brought up with very peculiar views, and"—

"No one could prejudice me against you but yourself, Lady Tintern," I answered with my usual incautiousness, of which I was immediately made aware by the glance of deep meaning which passed between Augusta and the Italian.

I ran quickly to my room, banging the door, and causing Arthur, who was seated gloomily by the fire, to turn round and ask me what on earth was the reason of my extraordinary conduct.

"Reason!" I repeated, passionately; "reason enough, I should think! Arthur, I am sick to death of being at Newton, and I wish to go home to-morrow, if you please."

But my husband was in no mood to bear quietly my exasperating behaviour, and he spoke scarce less angrily than I had done—"You are at perfect liberty to please yourself, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, so long as you do not interfere with my arrangements. I shall remain with my friends as long as I originally intended, for I am not aware of any thing having occurred to alter my plans."

"I shall take the child and Agnes with me," I continued; "of course, I have no power over your movements, but I shall long remember with gratitude your readiness to oblige your wife in one of the first requests she ever made to you!"

Arthur loved me dearly; and, though a little fiery (and, in truth, he had enough to try him), he was speedily softened towards me. He took my hand, and said affectionately—

"My dear Caroline, you made no request that I heard. You came here of your own free-will and consent; and surely, to Lord Tintern—if you dislike the lady too much to admit her claims—some explanation is due for quitting his house in this sudden and unheard-of manner, as if you had received some insult in it. If you have any real cause for wishing to go home, you know, my darling, I will take you there this minute;" and Arthur was going to embrace me, but I turned away with a shudder, shrinking from his very touch.

"Oh! very well," he said; "as you please. I will just tell you that I shall very soon become totally indifferent to any thing you choose to say or do, for you are fast wearing out my affection."—And he entered his dressing-room, shut the door, and went down to dinner without another word.

Well might my conduct appear inexplicable and disgusting to my husband, knowing nought of my suspicions! But I perverted all he said or did into a fresh confirmation of their truth; and my imagination, unchecked by principle

unguided by reason, was becoming day by day more distorted.

It was a dreadful dinner; though I had the satisfaction of perceiving that Arthur had not yet attained his threatened indifference where I was concerned, and he looked as wretched as I could possibly desire (the secret consciousness of guilt, I thought!) and was silent throughout the whole of the repast. Lord Tintern, at the bottom of the table, was the picture of misery, and spoke no more than his duty as host required of him; while his sister was quite unable to rally her spirits. Augusta herself had not recovered from the effect of a scene with her husband, and her dear friend drooped her head, apparently in a state of the deepest dejection. Henry Mordaunt was dining in the neighbourhood; Frank Sutherland was never more than a good-looking stick; and though Captain Spencer exerted himself, and Agnes came forward more than was her wont, yet I am sure all felt relieved when Lady Tintern gave the signal for the ladies to leave the table. Before going to dinner, I had given orders for my carriage to be in readiness in the morning; and, before the gentlemen joined us, I told Augusta, with as much politeness as I could assume, that I was under the painful necessity of returning home the next day. Her countenance expressed unfeigned surprise at this unexpected announcement, but it lighted up again when I said that I believed Captain Mildmay Vernon would remain at Newton for the ten days originally proposed. Yet with much pretended sorrow, and with a good deal of very genuine curiosity, she strove to combat my resolution.

"She was quite aghast, and Lord Tintern would be no less distressed than herself. Did I want any thing from Vernon Hall? They could send at a moment's notice."

"No, thank you," I answered; "no deputy can transact the business that takes me hence. You must pardon my apparent rudeness, Augusta, and believe that I am justified by the circumstances of the case."

She made no reply, and I was convinced that she was inwardly rejoiced at the prospect of my departure. And I went, accompanied by Agnes and my child, and Arthur stayed—but only two days after me. Then his resolution failed, and he came home. He came, but only to find a sullen, unkind wife, who received him with scarcely a show

of affection. And thus the seed was sown for a harvest of bitter discord.

Before Arthur's return, I had a note from Mr. Deloraine. He told me that his search had been a fruitless one, so far as learning any tidings of Mademoiselle Salvi; but he confessed that he was not quite at ease as to the fate of the unhappy Marchesa Monti, for he had heard rumours that there was a sort of mystery hanging over her last hours at Leghorn. These rumours, however, had unfortunately not reached his ears till he had arrived once more in England, too late for him to instigate any inquiries on the spot; and family matters must now detain him in his own country, even had he any substantial reason to allege for revisiting Italy. He added, that if at any time I should hear of or from my old *protégée*, he was sure he might trust to my kindness and interest in her cause, to let him know immediately.

I returned a polite answer; and so the affair ended again for the present.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEARLY two years have elapsed since the events recorded in my last chapter.

Arthur and I are again sitting together at Vernon Hall. It is after dinner—it has been a cold, raw November day, and now the bright, blazing fire, with our arm-chairs close to it, and the curtains drawn, impart that air of comfort and cheerfulness so characteristic of a winter evening in England. And again we are discussing an approaching Christmas party, but this time it is to be at our own home.

My mind is still burdened with my dreadful secret, which has contributed to sour my temper and disposition, and to render our life unhappy; and yet, on the whole, the last two years have not been so exceedingly miserable as I had anticipated. For Lord Tintern's health had again declined, and so rapidly that the physicians had ordered him to a milder climate very soon after our visit to Newton; and he had only just been permitted to return to his native land, bringing with him his wife and child, who still lived, delicate and fragile as she was. During this long period my suspicions of Arthur's fidelity had in some degree abated: there were moments—and those not few or far between—when, notwithstanding all my hastiness and unkindness, I could discern signs of his deep attachment to me, to the reality of which I could not altogether close my eyes; but still the evil spirit of doubt and distrust was there, though his baneful and deceptive light had at times been wellnigh extinguished. Beyond general hints and accusations, I had never breathed to my husband the subject which was so disquieting me; nor to Agnes had I confided more than frequent complaints of unhappiness, or ill-usage at the hands of my fellow-creatures, to which remarks my cousin

would reply in a soothing tone, and urge me to look at the brighter and more hopeful side of things.

There is one source of joy and delight shared equally by Arthur and myself—and that is our little son, now grown into a noble boy, and still our only one; for the daughter who had been given us some months back, was taken from us when but a few weeks old. Agnes is on a visit at Hartley Grange; and Arthur and I have been talking happily about the child so dear to us both, when the conversation changes, and this projected party comes under discussion.

First, I resist the suggestion of inviting Mr. and Mrs. Bankes, and Miss Bateman (who has lived with them since the death of her mother); but Arthur says that, as Mr. Bankes is so near a neighbour—he having quitted the army on his marriage, and purchased the late Mrs. Bateman's house—it will not do to leave them out, merely because they are not especially fascinating or delightful. I yield at last with a very fair grace, even adding, that I would give much to be as kind and as tolerant of "bores" as my husband.

But then comes the proposal, which has haunted me like a bugbear ever since I heard of the intended return of Lord and Lady Tintern—namely, that our friends from Newton should join our circle.

Arthur mentioned this as a matter of course; and, considering the intimacy that had always subsisted between the family at Hartley Grange and my own, and the old friendship between himself and Edward, it was but natural that he should. What should I say? I could not tell my real ground of objection to receiving Augusta; every day seemed only to augment my horror at the idea of confessing myself to have acted the part of an eavesdropper.

"Why, surely you don't hesitate about this," said Arthur, observing my moody and discontented countenance; "you are only trying to aggravate your poor, easy husband! Come, Caroline, dear, let us have no unnecessary disputes. I suppose, next, you will be objecting to my old friend Spencer?"

"I hate Lady Tintern," I answered passionately, "and never wish to set eyes on her again!"

"That is hardly fair, my love, returned Arthur. I admit—and admit with sorrow, as she is Edward's wife—that she is undeserving of any great portion of your regard

or esteem, but still you are bound to treat her with civility; and I must beg that you will raise no further difficulty about inviting one of my most valued friends."

"As you please," I rejoined; "only pray don't expect me to be coaxing and flattering Augusta all day long, for I will not do it!"

"I should be very much annoyed if I saw you coaxing and flattering her at all," said my husband. "Really, Caroline, I must say that your conduct is quite inexplicable to me, and I am afraid you are adding capriciousness to your other faults."

I could not command myself; and I rose and hastily quitted the room, to conceal from Arthur the bitter feelings that would have vent. But the days were gone by when he would have followed me to my chamber, and striven to soothe and pacify me. I had tried his patience too often, and too long, and he remained quietly in the drawing-room; till, finding that I did not re-appear, he took his hat, and went to spend an hour or two at the Rectory, where he was certain of meeting with cheerfulness and kindness, and where the voice of discord was unheard. Mr. and Mrs. Willis had just arrived, and Arthur took the opportunity of inviting them all to join our festivities each day; for, as I have before mentioned, they were sufficiently near us to admit of such an arrangement.

I discovered my husband's absence on going down to tea. The servant who brought it in told me his master had left word that he was gone to the Rectory, and begged I would not wait for him. He did not come home till our usual bedtime; but he had quite recovered his good-humour, and began telling me how pleased all the Mordaunts were to hear of the approaching dissipation, as they called it, at Vernon Hall, and how well and cheerful the Willises were looking, &c. &c. At length, finding I offered no comment, and took no notice of his efforts to amuse me, he suddenly stopped, took up a book, and settled himself by the fire with an air of pretended indifference. But by the workings of his countenance, and its gloomy expression, I could perceive how little there was of indifference at his heart.

Often I think, in sadly musing over those days, how utterly hateful and contemptible I must have appeared both to him and to Agnes, ignorant, as they were, of the cause

which could alone palliate my unnatural conduct. Not that I would attempt to excuse it on any grounds, but it has entailed its own heavy punishment on my head.

However, the contest on this occasion was not renewed. I wrote to Lady Tintern, coolly but politely; and she "*joyfully*" accepted the invitation for herself, her husband, and child. We met with few refusals; old Mrs. Mivart was delighted, and exerted herself to the utmost; and though I fear my readers must by this time be tired of parties assembled in country houses, yet I must inflict upon them some description of this one, as it has been the most important era in my life. Within two days of the time appointed for their arrival, I had a few hasty lines from Augusta, apologising for taking the liberty which only our old friendship could excuse; but her dearest Francesca had just joined her, and she hoped I would forgive her bringing her and her maid, saying that the latter would wait upon them both, and would in fact be substituted for Lady Tintern's own attendant, who had quitted her service. She added, that she had wished to spare us the trouble of accommodating her little darling; but that Lord Tintern had no confidence in her *bonne*, and would not consent to leave her alone with the servants, and Lady Hartley and Lady Elizabeth were both too unwell to be charged with the care of a delicate child. There was a postscript, which ran thus—

"DEAREST MADAM—I am ashamed beyond measure, but Lady Tintern says her letter *must* go. Pray put me anywhere—in a garret, in a cellar. I am so miserable at the idea of intruding.—Your's in all truth,

"FRANCESCA."

My feelings on reading this note I will not attempt to describe. My agitation was so excessive, that it attracted the attention of Arthur, who was reading his own letters by the fire; and Agnes half rose from her seat, as though fearing I should faint, and sat down again, as vexed at having been betrayed into noticing what I wished to conceal.

"No bad news, I trust, my love," said my husband.

"I don't know what *you* may consider it, Arthur; but here it is. You can pass it on to Agnes, if you please."

He read it without comment, handed it to my cousin, and

resumed his occupation. This indifference nettled me beyond any thing—I never could bear it from my husband—and least of all just now, when she, who was in league with the destroyer of my happiness, and from whose deceitful lips I had learnt that first overwhelming intelligence, was actually inviting herself as a guest to my own house, and, as he must know, putting me to inconvenience by so doing.

“Very pleasant this, truly!” I observed; “though you do seem to take it so coolly. Our house is large, but every hole and corner of it is filled already, and I see nothing to be done, but to write and state the case as it is. Unless, indeed, Agnes, you would like to have Mademoiselle Monti for a bed-fellow—or perhaps I had better put her with Laura.”

“I beg you will do neither the one nor the other,” interposed Arthur. “I never liked the girl, and am very sorry she is coming; but you must see, dear Caroline, that it would be quite impossible to decline receiving her. One of the men must take another bed at the Rectory.”

“There is not one disengaged,” I answered; “but I dare say it could be managed if Agnes would take a young lady into her room.”

Arthur never could endure that my cousin should be in the least put out of her way for any one, on any occasion; and, knowing his feeling, I tried in this unworthy manner to punish him for opposing me, though I had not the slightest idea of doing as I proposed.

“I shall be most happy”—Agnes began; but Arthur interrupted her vehemently—

“Caroline, I will not have it so. Agnes shall not be inconvenienced for the sake of these silly girls. You can take Mr. Hasted’s room, and I will arrange for his accommodation elsewhere.”

Again I was under the necessity of submitting, which I did very sullenly; and I positively refused to answer Augusta’s note. She, however, chose to read my silence as consent; indeed, she had begged I would not put myself to the trouble of writing, when I must have so much to do and to think of; and, on the appointed day, the whole party from Newton made their appearance. They were among the latest arrivals, for so had I planned it, intending thus to avoid any tender scene between Arthur and Augusta, who had not met for nearly two years.

I could discern no change in any except in the child, who looked so slight, so pallid—her large, dark, thoughtful eyes, so like her father's, seeming larger still from the extreme thinness of the tiny face to which they belonged. She was not pretty; and yet there was that in her still melancholy air which interested you. She had nothing of infancy about her but its innocence; and I could have found it in my heart to pity her mother—had she possessed aught of a mother's feelings—when our little Arthur came bounding into the room, so fine a boy, so strong and vigorous. Lady Tintern, however, appeared in a great measure to have abandoned the farce of pretending to care much for the child, and now observed, that Edward paid her enough attention for both parents, and she had no doubt would succeed admirably in spoiling her. I marked how the little Augusta crept instinctively to his knee, as, quite unused to be with other children, she was half frightened by Arthur's boisterous advances; and how gently Lord Tintern soothed and encouraged her to go and have a game of play with her new companion. She was not long in being brought to consent to this, and the two children left the room together.

My manner was very chilling to my two lady guests; but for this I was hardly to be blamed had all the circumstances been known. As it was, however, my husband was far more pointedly kind and attentive to Augusta than I had ever seen him before, as if to compensate for my icy politeness.

The party was a large one, and did as I suppose such parties generally do when assembled in a country-house in the depth of winter. The gentlemen shot, hunted when the weather would allow them, and, when compelled to remain in-doors, they wiled away the time by flirting over pretended lessons at billiards, or skimming through the last new novel. The ladies walked, drove, and did fancy-work; and the evenings were occupied in music and cards.

One day at dinner, Lady Tintern was talking about some charades, which she had seen acted in first-rate style at the English embassy at Florence; and she appealed to Francesca to confirm her warmly expressed admiration of them. Mademoiselle Monti usually confirmed what her patroness said, though I do not believe that she had ever witnessed any of these performances at Lord ——'s. I was about to ask some

rather minute question in the hope of exposing her (I rarely addressed her at all unless with some such motive), when Miss Bateman exclaimed—

“La! how charming! Couldn’t we have some here? Dear Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, what do you say? Surely this very evening”——

“Delightful!” murmured Augusta in a low voice, which reached the ear of Arthur, for which it was intended—and reached mine too, which had no business to have heard it.

“Ah, me!” chimed in Mrs. Norman Bankes; “how it would recall old days to me! ‘Those village bells, their tuneful chime!’”

The others, with more politeness, waited to see what my own and Captain Vernon’s wishes might be before they expressed their own; and Arthur looked at me. I hated the notion—as I hated every thing just then—and there was an awkward silence, at length broken by Mr. Bankes entering upon one of his harangues, which he opened by observing that, “in his opinion, such exhibitions might be made conducive to the acquirement of information, when historical subjects were chosen for representation (here he raised his voice for the benefit of the whole table), while amusement was constituted the handmaid of instruction, and things, apparently frivolous, were brought to bear upon higher and more useful ends. History, considered generally,”—he was proceeding to remark, when I interrupted him with little ceremony; and he subsided into a lower tone, still continuing his discourse, in which such phrases and sentences, as—“The luminous pages of Mr. Gibbon”—“Mr. Hume’s garbled notions,”—and “The great social machine,” were somewhat indistinctly blended together.

“I fear we have no suitable costumes,” I began; but I was assailed by a chorus of voices, no longer scrupling to evince their eagerness, and assuring me that, if that were the only objection, it could be easily overcome. While I was pondering how to find a stronger one, I heard a Mrs. Bolton, who was seated near Lady Tintern, address her in rather a louder pitch than she was accustomed to use. Mrs. Bolton was the wife of a country clergyman who had been a curate till very late in life, and had maintained a family of twelve, and procured the means of educating them by keeping a school himself. She was as good an old creature as ever lived;

kind, excellent, and truly attached to her husband and children; but her maternal pride and her simplicity would sometimes betray themselves together on the subject of her youngest daughter, whose pretty face and sentimental manner had captivated a wealthy baronet. The old lady said, speaking, like Mr. Bankes, for the edification of all around her—

“Acting charades! that reminds me, Lady Tintern, of what my daughter, Lady Hewell, wrote me word. She happened to be with her husband at one of the foreign minister’s ‘At Homes,’ when her great friend, Lady Fanny Wormley, came up to her and said—‘Do you know, Lady Hewell, you really ought to personate Iphigenia in the grand charades that are coming off at papa’s! You have just the face and figure for it!’ But Sir Theophilus Hewell wouldn’t hear of it, as my Helen very well knew; he is rather particular, Lady Tintern, so she said”——

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Bolton,” Augusta interposed, in her blindest voice; “but I have not the honour of knowing any of the distinguished persons to whom you allude. Sir Theophilus Hewell, did you say? I think I have heard my father mention *his*—was he not a rich old alderman, who was made a baronet on the occasion of some royal visit to the city? But my memory is rather confused about these things.”

The poor old lady looked completely crestfallen, and I was extremely angry with Augusta, who rarely took the trouble of making herself enemies in this gratuitous manner; but I suppose she had lost her temper at my opposition, and was bored by good Mrs. Bolton’s garrulity. It was not lost upon me, that Arthur was busily engaged in conversing with his neighbour on the other hand, when Lady Tintern gave vent to her ill-nature; and the next minute he turned his head and said to me—

“I think it is rather a good idea, Caroline. We will not attempt to be too grand at first, and we can easily look up some things.” He stopped, struck by my sullen, disobliging face; then he bent towards Augusta, and added—“You will act with me this evening—won’t you, Lady Tintern?”

She gave him a look, which spoke far more eloquently than words could have done.

“You heard your husband’s proposition, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon?” said Captain Spencer; “will you act with me?”

"Gladly!" I answered.

I had no power to say more. My heart was breaking with sorrow, and bursting with indignation at the same moment. "I will have my revenge now," I thought, "no matter at what cost! Captain Spencer loves me still, and Arthur shall know some of the bitter pangs of jealousy, under which I am constantly writhing; that is to say, if I have yet the power to make him jealous!"

And I began by encouraging Captain Spencer to devote himself to me during the remainder of dinner, smiling upon him in a way which I could see rejoiced him, and agreeing in all he said, instead of arguing with him, as was my wont. I did not take into consideration how much I had provoked my husband, by doing my utmost to make himself and me appear to the greatest possible disadvantage in the eyes of our guests, when I ought to have hailed a proposal which gave them all pleasure; and I found it convenient to forget how, for months and years, I had tormented Arthur by my pride and violence, to a degree which must have cooled, if not obliterated, an attachment less sincere and ardent than he entertained for me.

Captain Vernon was honourable, straightforward, and kind-hearted; he would have shrunk with horror from the bare idea of wronging Lord Tintern; but he argued with himself, that there could be no harm in flirting a little with the beautiful Lady Tintern, whose evident predilection for him was flattering to his vanity, however his better judgment might condemn it. Edward, he well knew, would not be annoyed by it—nay, would not even remark it; and it might be the means of bringing me to my senses, to see that my husband might grow tired of my never-ending humours and caprices. So he talked and laughed exclusively with Augusta, while I did the same with my old admirer.

Oh! how his eye flashed with delight, and his countenance betrayed his exultation, at discovering that his passionate words on my rejection of him had not fallen to the ground—that their fulfilment seemed close at hand. I heard Lady Tintern congratulate my husband on his success in the House, and hint at her regret that Lord Tintern had not the gift of eloquence; and I heard Arthur tell her that *such* praise was a reward indeed. And more and more gracious I became to Captain Spencer; when, looking up, I caught Francesca's

eyes fixed upon me, with that same gaze of deep and malignant meaning which I had before observed in them. From me she looked to the bottom of the table, as if to direct my attention to what was passing there—there was small need of that! and I could see that she was drinking in the whole scene with eager delight. But I felt as if the die was now cast—as if Arthur had relinquished me for another, and I had only my pride to sustain me. I trusted to that broken reed, and for the present it upheld me.

I sat rather longer than usual at dessert, and swept out of the room with my most majestic air, avoiding Arthur's eye; and directly we reached the drawing-room, I began quite eagerly—

"Now for our preparations! Laura, and Agnes, and whoever likes to come with me—we will go and hunt for costumes."

"Oh! let me be of the party, dear Caroline?" cried Augusta. "Francesca, follow me."

"Will Mrs. Mildmay Vernon kindly permit?"—

"As you please!" said I, carelessly; "*ce m'est égal!*"

And I spoke truly, for all things were indifferent to me but the restless, burning desire of revenge. We found what we most wanted, and Arthur had engaged to provide for the gentlemen. I suppose the excited state of my feelings must have imparted an additional brilliancy to my dark eye, and a warmer glow to my somewhat pale cheek; for Laura observed to me how remarkably well I was looking, and in what excellent spirits I appeared to be. Her words sounded in my ear as a vain and hollow mockery; and yet I exulted in the conviction they carried home to me, that I was playing my part so successfully. And all the time I was chasing a phantom—I was fighting with an imaginary evil—and madly striving after my own misery.

"I may return the compliment, dear Laura," said I, with a gay laugh; "for I never saw you appear to more advantage. The last two years have given you that graceful, womanly finish, and now I pronounce you perfect."

"Thanks, dear Caroline! but I can't boast of my spirits. I am going to look at my little niece—will you come?"

We went; and from the cot of one sleeping child, we passed to that of the other. There lay my boy—his rosy cheek resting quietly on the pillow—his bright eyes closed in a tranquil sleep—his luxuriant fair hair curling round his

head—his whole aspect that of peace and repose ; and even at that early age reminding me so strongly of his father. Did no warning voice speak to me, in soft yet earnest accents, bidding me look not in vain on that slumbering picture of innocence, but take heed in time how I betrayed my solemn trust, as a wife and a mother, by even appearing to be what I was not? I stooped to kiss my little Arthur ; and a hot, burning tear fell from my face to his, without disturbing the soundness of his rest. But I resisted the good and kindly impulse, and whispered to myself that my blood had never borne insult tamely, and I would not be the first to disgrace it.

Presently the gentlemen joined us. My husband looked flushed and heated, and I thought he had been drinking more wine than usual. Captain Spencer was at my side in an instant, as cool and collected as ever.

The opening scene of the first charade was to represent Arria voluntarily plunging the poniard into her devoted breast, and then handing it to her husband with the memorable words,—“ My Pætus, it is not painful !” There was an unanimous cry among the performers in the anteroom, that I must “ lead off,” as being the lady of the house, and also the one best fitted to personate the Roman matron. I consented at once.

“ And now, Caroline, you must make choice of your Pætus,” said Arthur, I believe still fondly hoping that I should select my real for my fictitious husband.

Without hesitation, I said—“ I make choice of Captain Spencer.”

I perceived directly, and with triumph and delight, that Arthur had not expected this. But he offered no remark, and the scene was enacted amid universal applause. Captain Spencer’s glance of grateful love was very lifelike, and, contrary to his general character, perfectly genuine. My hand was as steady as that of Arria herself could have been, in her strong contempt of death, as I handed the sword to my Pætus, and pronounced my short but speaking sentence as effectively as I could.

Miss Bateman was dying to exhibit, and had wearied us all with long, rambling descriptions of how she had been admired in various tableaux in London, and the sensation she had produced ; while Mrs. Bankes was scarcely less anxious to have a prominent part assigned to her. I suppose the

chief reason that young ladies are so extremely partial to charades is, that it affords so good an opportunity for the display of their personal charms. Be that as it may, both these ladies were gratified in the course of the evening; for Agnes declined at once unless she was really wanted, and Lady Laura was quite willing to relinquish her claims in favour of those who cared so much more about it. Mr. Bankes was rather troublesome by his obstinacy, and his wish to set us all right; but I shall only especially notice the charade in which Arthur and Augusta appeared together.

It was an imaginary love scene—something in the style of Claude Melnotte and his Pauline in “The Lady of Lyons”—Mademoiselle Monti officiating as the friend who connives at their secret meetings; and Lady Tintern looked so very lovely and bewitching when she appeared in her peasant’s costume, that an involuntary murmur of applause arose from the spectators. Had she kept strictly to her part she would have had little to do; but, suddenly, the arm she was extending towards her lover fell powerless by her side—her eye closed, as on a well-remembered day—and she fell senseless into the arms of my husband. He bore her hastily into the adjoining room, quickly followed by Lord Tintern, his sister, myself, and Francesca, who wrung her hands, and looked the picture of consternation. She it was who supported Augusta’s head when Arthur had placed her gently on the sofa, and Edward knelt beside her and bathed her temples with eau de Cologne. To all appearance this fainting fit was a real, not a pretended one; for, though I had not before observed it, I now saw that her bright cheek had become deadly pale, and her hand was cold and clammy. Gradually she revived, and the first words uttered by her sweet voice were to express her regret at giving so much trouble—

“Thank you, dear Edward, and all my kind friends, I am much better; but I will attempt no more acting this evening, it was rather too much for me (looking at Captain Vernon). I fear I must have half-crushed you in my fall, Arthur! Caroline, dear, your pity should be reserved for your husband, I think.”

She made an effort to rise, but her strength seemed still unequal to it, and she sank gracefully backwards, entreating us all to return to the company.

"I will stay with Lady Tintern!" exclaimed Francesca. "May I not, dearest?"

"I will not give you that trouble, Mademoiselle Monti," said Edward, in his most decided manner; "I shall remain myself with Lady Tintern."

The Italian girl dared not resist; so, murmuring some words about her cruel fate, we left the husband and wife together. Arthur returned to them, bearing a glass of sal-volatile and water, and immediately rejoined his guests.

This untoward event threw rather a damp over the evening's amusements; though Mr. Bankes made a desperate attempt to revive them by his spirited representation of Cicero in his retirement at Tusculum, surrounded by his books. When it was over, and he was receiving the compliments of his friends, he thanked them carelessly, and observed that it was a situation in which he felt himself quite at home.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AUGUSTA did not re-appear that night. Lord Tintern brought me her apologies, and retired himself. Arthur had certainly been exceeding—probably with a view to drown his cares and raise his spirits. He came to my room in a state of considerable excitement, as his flashing eye betokened before he spoke, which he speedily did, to exclaim enthusiastically on the loveliness of Lady Tintern, whose equal, he declared, he had never yet beheld; and he expressed his earnest hope that she would not suffer from her good-natured exertions. A smile from her was like——

But here I interrupted him. I spoke, not in his loud voice, but in the smothered tones of an indignation too deep to vent itself in noise. I said, that Augusta was a demon assuming the form of an angel of light; that a false, treacherous woman was no name for her; and that I had proof sufficient to justify all I was saying——

“Allow me to ask you, if you know more of her than I do?” interposed Arthur.

“No, thank Heaven! not half so much,” was my fervent rejoinder: “I would scorn to be intimate with one who can betray the best and kindest husband that woman was ever blest with, and take a viper to her bosom instead! I would scorn to be a friend to her who, feeling no affection for her child or its father, has no scruple in declaring herself to be devoted to the husband of another! And for that viper, what words will describe her in her true character? Without honour, or gratitude, or one single human feeling but avarice and the desire of revenge—her only talent, that of exceeding cunning—her only recommendation, that of fawning and flattery. In her mock humility, she told me to put her in a garret or a cellar, and truly it would be the

fittest place for her ; for she is worthy only to associate with loathsome vermin and reptiles—such reptiles, it seems, we meet with among our fellow-creatures : I have to thank her for the knowledge."

"Thank *you*, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, a thousand times, for this elegant harangue," said my husband, sneeringly; "and thank you too, my love, for opening my eyes at once to the real characters of so many—my wife included. I really could not have believed that her ideas were so pure, or her vocabulary so choice—I am greatly indebted to you!"

"Arthur! you will deplore this fatal evening to your dying day—mark my words!"

"I am very sleepy, and will trouble you to let me seek the repose I need."

"Oh, yes!" I retorted bitterly; "intoxication generally requires repose!"

My husband shut his door as I pronounced these words, and so put an end to further altercation for the present. I was so worn out with the violence of my emotions, that I fell into a deep slumber, which lasted till I was called in the morning. When I rang my bell, Mrs. Mivart answered it, and asked if she might officiate for me in the place of my own maid, as she had a few words that she wished to say to me; and, while the house was so full of company, she never could get me alone. She did not wait for the permission which she knew would be accorded, but continued, saying—

"You look but poorly, my dear young lady; ah! you are changed truly from what Miss Vernon used to be!"

"I am indeed, Mrs. Mivart—I am cruelly changed," burst from my overcharged heart; and I sank into a chair, and relieved myself by a flood of tears.

"Come, cheer up, dear lady!" said the faithful old house-keeper; "you were never much given to crying, and, whatever you do, don't let any one see it. This is a time, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, if I may venture to say so," and she drew herself up to her full height, and put on her stateliest manner—"this is a time, of all others, when your dignity is most wanted. And, to tell the truth, madam, it was on this subject that I wished to speak to you." She stopped, but I signified to her that she might proceed without delay. "Perhaps you may remember, madam, that when Lady Tintern was here as Miss Sutherland, I made the

remark to you that I did not altogether like her, for all she was so beautiful and had such a taking manner, and people cried her up so much? Well, Mrs. Vernon, I should not be doing my duty if I did not tell you the plots that are going on beneath your own roof. That Italian friend, Miss Monti, or whatever they call her, is a very devil, and her maid is no better than herself. These are hard words, I know, madam; but not harder than the truth. Two or three trifles I have missed out of the kitchen and store-room, and laid them directly to Françoise; but of course I could not bring it home to her, though she was always sliving and sneaking about where she had no business—just like her mistress there. Well, madam, yesterday morning I went into Lady Tintern's room to fetch out a counterpane left there by mistake; and I had to go to the closet close to his lordship's dressing-room, and her ladyship and Miss Monti were seated there, and never heard me come in. I never was a listener, madam, as you well know—I always scorned it, but I couldn't help catching two or three words, and then I thought I should be only right to stay and hear more, for they were plotting and scheming against you, under your own roof, as I said before, Mrs. Vernon."

And here I felt that I ought to stop Mrs. Mivart, and tell her that I could not consent to her repeating a conversation which had not been intended either for her or me to hear. There was a time when I should not have hesitated; but, now, I had yielded to a similar temptation myself, and the voice of conscience spoke less powerfully. So I suffered my eager desire to know the worst to get the better of my remaining scruples, and allowed Mrs. Mivart's sophistry, by which she reconciled herself to her conduct, to pass unnoticed. She went on—

"'Well, Augusta,' that toady was saying, 'was I not right two years ago, when I told you how dearly he loved you? And now there only wants just a little management on your part to bring him to declare his mind. Then, as he seems getting so tired of his own cross wife, you'll see he'll never rest without an elopement.' I give you my word, madam, that I never thought for one instant who it was they were talking of; I only saw that her ladyship was playing false with that excellent Lord Tintern, that I have loved from a boy, and that that woman was urging her on

to destruction. Her ladyship looked thoughtful, so the other went on—'I think we shall be able to make Françoise of great use, my darling friend: I have proved her, and know her to be a quick, ready girl, and trustworthy.' 'But, Francesca,' says her ladyship, 'are you quite, quite sure yet that Arthur loves me? I try to hope it, but sometimes I think I am deceived.' 'Really, Augusta, I've no patience with you when you talk so—it's as if you wished to cast away your happiness. Why, does he not devote himself to you all day long, scarcely noticing the other ladies, and rarely speaking to Mrs. Vernon, of whom he used to be so fond? Your charms, my love, and her jealousy, have done their work at last—she may hold down her head a little now, with all her accursed pride! But let me impress one thing upon you, Augusta: I have watched your lover—I know him well—and I tell you that you must give him more encouragement. He is very shy with you; and besides, though I believe he has no longer any absurd scruples about his own wife, he has about your husband. Now, you must scatter these to the winds'—this I believe was exactly what she said, madam; 'in fact, you must all but tell him that you love him, and are ready to fly with him!'

"Ah! Francesca, if I dared!" puts in Lady Tintern; 'but if he should despise me for ever?'

"Your love is less strong than I took it for," says the other, 'if you daren't risk something. You must do it, if you wish to succeed.'

"If I wish it!" answers her ladyship; 'don't mock me, Francesca! You know my whole happiness depends on the way this desperate game turns out, or something like that, madam.'

"And they went on to talk about the elopement, and how useful that French maid would be in lying and all sorts of wickedness, and how Miss Monti was to make believe to be all aghast and frightened when it was found out that my master had gone off with that baggage—your pardon, madam, for the word—and how they two would live together in a little garden of Eden, and a great deal more such stuff, which I don't pretend to understand. But all of a sudden up jumps her ladyship, calling out,—'There's my husband, Francesca! He'd better not find you here: ' and in comes my lord at one door, and she runs and kisses him, so fond

like ; and out comes my young lady at the other, and stumbles upon me at the closet. I saw she looked frightened all in an instant, as if she thought I might have heard something, but didn't choose to ask, so she says—

" 'Mrs. Mivart, here's a guinea for you—you're a good old soul,' and looks me through and through.

"I put back the money, and said, 'Thank you, ma'amselle, but I'm well paid by my own mistress, and I don't want to take your money.'

"So she pressed me a bit, but, seeing it was no good, presently she takes it back.

"Now, madam, I don't mean to insult either you or my master by believing a word of their lies ; but I've lived a long life, and I've seen as wise as he led away by bad artful women, and I'd have you look to yourself and him. And, my dear young lady," pursued the old woman with increasing earnestness, while the tears forced themselves through her withered eyelashes—"my dear young lady, remember that I've loved you dearly all your life, and your father and grandfather before you ; and don't take it amiss in an old servant if I say, that I'm sure you'd be happier if you'd study your husband rather more, and not cross him as much as you've done of late."

"Ah ! Mrs. Mivart," I answered despairingly ; "it is too late now ! I have lost his love for ever ! And yet I have not altogether deserved it, for my heart has ever been true to him ; but that vile woman, with her beauty and her blandishments"—

A knock at the door, and a message from my husband that breakfast was waiting. I hastened to complete my toilet, for I was resolved to appear just as usual, and allow no sign to be discernible of the inward flame that was consuming me. Mrs. Mivart's warning words were unheeded—no wonder, when I banished all idea of weighing my actions by the rule of duty or principle.

It avails not to trace the progress of my infatuation—how, day by day, I encouraged more and more the display of Captain Spencer's affection for me, and allowed him to devote himself exclusively to me. He and the party from Newton stayed on after our guests had left us ; and for three weeks Arthur took no sort of notice—at least, not apparently—of the desperate game I was playing ; but, as

if to punish me for my coldness and estrangement towards himself, he redoubled his attentions to Lady Tintern, and her eye beamed with delight, and her face was covered with smiles, and for the time she was triumphant. Laura had gone home, and no friend remained to me but Agnes. Francesca watched—it was all she had to do at present. Lord Tintern occasionally seemed to have a sort of uneasy consciousness that all was not as it should be, for a general air of discomfort pervaded the house.

But Edward was of an unsuspecting and unobservant disposition, and would have trusted his friend Mildmay in any thing. And all the while my husband and I had no love but for each other; and I am not exaggerating the truth when I declare that I would gladly have died for him, though I was daily and hourly striving to render him miserable.

Captain Spencer was a man who was seldom overcome by the effects of wine. Arthur was more easily affected by it; but, one evening, I could perceive the traces of a very long after-dinner sitting even in the former, while my husband was terribly excited. And, for the first time, Captain Spencer ventured upon words of love, and spoke to me as though I were not the wife of another. My pride was up in arms in an instant, and my deep affection for Arthur increased my indignation to the highest pitch. I desired Captain Spencer never more to dare to appear in my presence: I told him I would never speak to him again after the insult he had offered me. And, heedless of his attempts to pacify me, I abruptly went to my own room.

My thoughts for some time were occupied only in dwelling on the humiliation I had received, and bitterly reproaching myself for the worse than folly by which I had subjected myself to it. Then flashed across me the recollection that my sudden departure could not pass unnoticed, and the overwhelming conviction that, in Arthur's state, some dreadful consequence would ensue. What could I do? I would have given worlds, had I possessed them, to have recalled the last few weeks; but, alas! the past is irretrievable. I was ashamed to return to the drawing-room. Yes, with all my pride, I was ashamed to face my husband, not knowing whether he had overheard any part of Captain Spencer's words, or of my reply. And, if he had, my

presence could do no good : if he had not, still I was better away. I had only myself to blame ; but this is indeed a miserable consolation when we are unhappy.

But a gentle, comforting voice sounded in my ears, and a soft hand was laid upon my shoulder ; and, by the flickering fire light, I could distinguish the form of Agnes. She had once ventured to remonstrate with me on my indiscretion, to say the least of it, in permitting the marked attentions of Captain Spencer, and I had rudely repulsed her ; but now, as ever, she was my truest friend. She had not been in the room when I had quitted it, only a very short time before the ladies' hour for retiring ; so she had no clear idea of what had driven me away.

"I am come to wish you good-night, dear Caroline ; Captain Vernon would not have you sent for, so Lady Tintern and Mademoiselle Monti are gone to bed. Are you quite well ?"

"Agnes !" I said, solemnly : "there will be blood shed here before another day is over."

She turned very pale. "I hope—I trust not !" she ejaculated fervently. "I feared all was not right below ; but never dreamed of aught so fearful, my dearest Caroline ; surely you are alarming yourself needlessly"——

"I pray God it may be so, Agnes. If I could but see my husband. Where is he ?"

"We left the three gentlemen together," she returned.

"Hush !" I whispered, "there are footsteps."

I looked out—Lord Tintern was ascending the stairs to his own apartment.

"Now they are alone !" I exclaimed. "My God, have mercy upon me !"

I could not have endured that long dreary night in solitude, and I entreated Agnes to bear me company. Her only reply was a kiss on my forehead, a pressure of my hand—and her mute sympathy went to my heart more powerfully than many words. She replenished the fire, for it was intensely cold, the snow falling heavily after a partial thaw ; and we sat down by it, and waited in breathless expectation.

Hour after hour dragged its weary length along—each time it seemed to me as if the clock would never strike again—but no sound disturbed the stillness of the night, nothing within or without told of aught but unbroken repose.

his features, a horseman was galloping furiously from under the archway; and, reckless of the dangerous state of the roads, he urged his steed impetuously along the avenue. He was quickly out of sight, but not before both my companion and I had recognised Arthur. Our eyes met—she, like myself, understood it all in a moment; and I believe the bitter agony of the conviction was scarcely less felt by herself than by me, though I did not then suspect it. She had looked so pale before, that her countenance altered little; and I uttered no sound. The impulse seized me that I would go to my husband's study, and see if I could discover any clue to his designs; and with this object I rushed from the room. I was not mistaken—he had evidently been writing for some hours; for papers were scattered in all directions, and on his table lay a note, addressed to Mrs. Mildmay Vernon. I tore it open, and read these words:—

“I dare not see *you*, lest it should unman me; but I have seen our child, and prayed God to bless him and his mother. I trust you will not discover this note or my departure till you know my fate; if you do, you will easily guess the cause of my absence from home; but, as these may be my last words to you, I solemnly declare to you, my beloved Caroline, that I believe you to have been true to me in heart, though induced to be false in appearance, for the sake of revenging yourself upon me. I forgive you all I may have to forgive, and implore your forgiveness for ever having been led to render you doubtful of my love, which has known no change nor decline, nor ever will, till the grave shall part us.

“Farewell, my beloved wife—my only treasure! If I fall to-day, with my dying breath shall I commend you and my son to the God of the widow and the fatherless!

“ARTHUR MILD MAY VERNON.”

I will not endeavour to describe my feelings on reading this letter—such repeated descriptions are wearisome, and must fail in conveying any adequate idea of the state of the sufferer's heart. At length I remembered Agnes; and, opening the door to call her, I found her in the hall. She had followed me so far, thinking I might require her assistance; but, ever considerate, she had not intruded upon my

privacy. My husband's words—ah ! perhaps his dying ones—were too sacred to be looked upon by any eyes but mine ; but I told her a part of the contents of his note, and said my only hope now was, that Captain Spencer, with all his faults, would never be so base as to fire at his earliest friend. Agnes agreed with me that this hope still remained ; and we sat down in Arthur's room to await the end.

It was as light as it was at all probable that it would be throughout that dark, wintry day ; and the sound of servants' footsteps, and the hum of servants' voices, began to be heard about the house. A shuffling at the door—a vain attempt or two to turn the lock—followed by a successful one—little Arthur came bounding in ; and, jumping on my lap, threw his arms round my neck. I could not speak, but Agnes said—

“ You are up early this morning, Arthur.”

“ Yes,” returned the child ; “ papa told me when I went to bed it would be hard frost, and he would take me before breakfast to see sliding on the lake. Mamma, is papa dressed ? and may I go to him ? ”

Again I tried to speak, but a choking sensation in my throat impeded my utterance, and a fresh attack of the sharp pain in my side forced me to put down the child. He looked chilled and disappointed ; but Agnes lifted him on her knee, and I could see that, as she kissed him, a few tears fell from her cheek and rested upon that of the noble boy who might so soon be fatherless. Little Arthur dearly loved his cousin Agnes ; and he asked her why she cried, and begged her not. His thoughts recurred to his anticipated morning's sport ; and again he asked if he might go to his papa, and waken him if he was still asleep.

“ You cannot go just now, my love, because he is busy,” said Agnes. “ Come, I know you will be a good, patient boy.”

“ Gussy wanted to go too, but she mayn't,” observed Arthur, “ because it's too cold for her. I may, because I'm a strong boy, and don't mind the cold.” And so he prattled on, in happy ignorance of all, evidently exulting in the display of his patience.

About half an hour had elapsed since we had seen my husband issue forth from the archway, and gallop along the avenue. I was inwardly reckoning that at least a couple of

hours' more suspense must be endured by me before I could know his fate, when a confused sound reached our ears, succeeded by a scuffling of footsteps in the passage, and Mrs. Mivart's voice was exclaiming—

"God of mercy! what is this?" and she uttered a half-suppressed shriek.

I had no power to move, or think, or feel—I knew some dreadful catastrophe had happened to Arthur; but I remained as if rooted to my chair. Agnes flew to me; but I was not faint—I was paralysed in body and mind. I distinctly heard Mrs. Mivart say—

"You may bring my poor master in here—the ladies are up-stairs."

Agnes rushed to the door, but she was too late; already the apparently lifeless body of my husband, borne by two men on a shutter, was in the room. Three or four others, and our old housekeeper, entered immediately afterwards; and, before any one of us had time to take breath, Mr. Hasted had joined us. My mind was so clear, that I comprehended directly that Arthur had engaged him for his second, he being still at the Rectory.

"Good Heavens! madam," said the horror-stricken Mrs. Mivart, "who'd have thought of finding you here? Now, go up-stairs—there's a dear young lady, do;" as though she were coaxing a wayward child.

But she spoke to heedless ears. My senses were now forsaking me—the scene before me was assuming the form of a ghastly vision—a dreadful nightmare. I stretched forth my arms, as if to embrace my husband; and the next instant I was no less unconscious and inanimate than he.

When I came to myself, I found that I was on my bed, and that Agnes was standing over me, and employing all the usual remedies to revive me. I tried to raise myself, but the effort was a languid one, and I inquired if I had overslept myself?

"You have not been quite well, my love," returned my cousin; "and you must keep still, if you please."

"I have been dreaming," I continued; "my dreams were very mazy, but still most horrible. Agnes, where is Arthur?" and I started up, and seized her arm with a vehemence that astonished her.

"He is not far off," she said, soothingly; "indeed, he

is close at hand ; but, Caroline, you must not stir at present."

"Is he dead?" I asked.

"No, no!" she answered, hurriedly.

"Blessed be God!" I ejaculated fervently ; and I hid my face in silent, but heartfelt, thanksgiving to Him who, as I fondly hoped, had spared me this awful bereavement. Then I said I would go to him, and Agnes soon perceived how useless it would be to contend with me.

"But I must warn you, dearest Caroline, that you will find him much hurt, for"——

"You don't mean that that man has been monster enough to shoot him?" I interposed.

"There has been no duel," my cousin explained ; "your husband's horse slipped on the icy ground, and, rolling completely over, threw his rider, and thus the injury has been received. Mr. Welling is here, and says Captain Vernon must be kept as quiet as possible. He has recovered his consciousness two or three times, but his head is not yet strong enough for him to retain it."

"I will wait till I am quite calm," I was just beginning, when some one rushed swiftly by the half-open door, giving vent to loud sighs, and one or two deep sobs, in her progress down the corridor, and a well-known voice exclaimed, wildly——

"Where is he? where is he? I will go to him—none shall keep me from him!"

This was enough for me. Regardless of all Agnes's remonstrances, I chased Augusta to the door of the room in which Arthur was lying, and which had been bolted by some one inside. She was frantically endeavouring to burst it open, and stamping impatiently on the floor.

"False, wicked woman!" I cried, "not deserving the name of woman! I charge you in this awful hour, stand not between me and my husband—strive no more to put asunder those whom God has joined together! Death will part us soon enough, I doubt not, to satisfy even your malice and hatred, and the revenge of the one who has done her utmost to plunge you into perdition!"

Before she could offer any reply, the bolt was withdrawn, and we both entered.

There, extended on a low couch at the foot of the bed, they

had laid my husband ; and there he was still, with only Mr. Mivart and Mr. Welling in attendance upon him. His face was white as the coverlet that had been hastily thrown over him ; and, except an occasional groan, he gave no sign by which a casual observer could have told that life was not extinct. Lady Tintern had anticipated all efforts to arrest her, and had flung herself on her knees by the sofa ; and, having seized Arthur's hand, was kissing it passionately. Another moment, and Mademoiselle Monti and Lord Tintern stood by her. His countenance, as he gazed on his wife thus employed, assumed a scarcely less ashy hue than that of the unconscious Arthur ; he took her round the waist, and forcibly dragged her from the room, but not before she had had time to cast a glance of deadly hatred at Francesca, and exclaim—"Wretch, you have betrayed me !"

That young lady, after smiling a grim smile of infinite satisfaction, took her departure also. Agnes had followed me ; and I found that she had insisted upon all noise and bustle being removed from Captain Vernon, and had sent instantly for the doctor, who happened to be paying an early visit to a sick child at our own lodge, and had thus been able to obey the summons without loss of time. Agnes, too, had had little Arthur carried off by his nurse, while still under the impression that his father was pretending to be asleep. Beyond two or three bruises and cuts, there was no external wound to be discerned in the sufferer ; and anxiously did I ask Mr. Welling if he believed that any severe internal injury had been sustained. He shook his head, and replied that he could not at present speak decidedly on that point, and wished that further advice should be called in. By my desire, my cousin went to give orders for the immediate departure of one messenger to the nearest large town, while another hastened to London to fetch the most eminent surgeon.

As she left the room, my husband unclosed his eyes, gazed vacantly around him, and relapsed into insensibility. At length, however, with the aid of our united efforts, consciousness returned, though the power of articulation was still weak and uncertain. But I was blest in the first connected words he uttered, for they were—

"Is that my dearest wife ?"

"Yes, dear Arthur, I am here. Oh ! thank God, that you can speak once more !"

He extended his hand to me, and was about to address me again, when Mr. Welling interposed, and peremptorily enjoined complete silence. He remained two hours longer, till he was obliged to leave us to see another patient. He promised to repeat his visit in the afternoon, and reiterated his injunctions as to the necessity of quiet and repose—not the slightest excitement was on any account to be permitted.

I watched my husband throughout that day, as sometimes he groaned in agony, or dozed at intervals when exhausted by pain, with alternate feelings of hope and despair. Mr. Welling returned; and when he had spent half-an-hour by Arthur's bedside, his face became very grave, and he had no word of encouragement to give me. The two surgeons, when they arrived, confirmed the mute verdict I had too surely read in his countenance, and attempted not to conceal from me that Arthur must die. He might linger, they said, for days—even for weeks; or he might be gone at any minute. The injury he had received was beyond the reach of human skill to remedy—they could but alleviate his torments by opiates and composing draughts.

On Agnes devolved the painful task of breaking this to me, and she did it with all the gentleness and tenderness of her gentle, tender nature; I told her that it was no surprise to me—that I had been convinced of it before, and that it was a judgment on my pride and hardness of heart. But why should I dwell on my feelings during those last days and weeks of my husband's life? There are afflictions, as, blessed be God, there are joys, which no tongue can tell nor pen describe. Even imagination fails in picturing them in all their vividness; and they who have experienced them can alone form any adequate conception of them.

My husband was quite sensible now, and, before Mr. —'s departure, he asked to speak with him alone. I knew that he was resolved upon hearing his fate, though he was himself fully persuaded what it must be.

Our first meeting after that interview was perhaps my hardest trial. When I approached his bedside, and saw his face so full of calm and resignation, as, with his feeble arm strengthened for the moment by the might of his affection, he strained me to him in one long fervent embrace, I could not contain myself; and, for the first and only time until he

died, I sobbed and groaned, and almost cried aloud, in the excess of my misery and despair. For, in addition to the heavy sorrow of parting with my husband, I was struggling with remorse—that most awful of foes—as the self-accusing voice within me whispered that, had it not been for me, Arthur would not now have been stretched on a couch of sickness and suffering, with the inevitable prospect of an early death before him.

“Arthur, I have killed you!” I exclaimed; “and, though you may forgive me, I never can forgive myself—God never will forgive me!”

My husband drew me to him. “Say not so, my darling; your words give me more pain than any bodily injury can inflict. Caroline! I speak as one who must shortly appear before his God; and I solemnly assure you that I die happy, thus nursed and tended by my beloved wife, and conscious of possessing her whole heart.”

So he soothed me, and calmed me; and though his words of love and gentleness pierced me like daggers, and were in fact my bitterest reproaches, yet I never gave way before him again. And I was already beginning to feel that my days were numbered—that I should not linger long after him in a world which to me would be so desolate when he was gone. It distressed me that I could not always conceal my racking cough, and the burning fever that seemed running through every vein, from Arthur and Agnes. I passed it off as lightly as I could; for I dreaded lest my husband should think me unfit for the office of a nurse, and insist on my taking more frequent rest. But I felt as if rest would have killed me—constant action alone sustained me; and I succeeded partially in disguising from all how ill I was, or was soon to be.

Arthur varied much from day to day; but he was seldom entirely free from pain, except when under the influence of sedatives; and there were times when the excruciating torture he endured brought out the perspiration in large drops upon his forehead, and made him clench his hands and set his teeth, to prevent any audible expression of his sufferings from escaping him.

I witnessed all this, and lived through it, and am still alive to tell the tale.

I cannot do justice to Agnes during this most trying

period. Ever at hand to do all that was required—regardless of mental or bodily fatigue—and yet never for one instant usurping my place, or forgetting that I was the wife—she was a bright example of how good and how unselfish human nature may be—how near akin, if we may so speak without presumption, to the angels of God. She was every thing to little Arthur, when his father was too ill to see him; though, when easier and better, he would always tell me to send for the child, and seemed happier when he was near him. Poor little fellow! he was too young to have any idea of death; and when the blank, chilling feeling that all was not right and cheerful as it used to be, was banished from his mind, he would laugh and prattle on as merrily as before.

I found from Agnes and the old housekeeper, that Lord Tintern had carried off his wife and child, and Mademoiselle Monti, an hour after the scene I have described above. Mrs. Mivart told me how vehemently Lady Tintern had resisted, but how it was all in vain; and that at last her husband had been compelled to place her with his own arms in the carriage which was to convey her home. My cousin had since heard from Lady Laura, that, for some still unknown cause, Francesca had betrayed her *friend's* secret, by pretending to Lord Tintern that his wife was taken ill, and leading him into Arthur's room at the very minute that she was giving full vent to her emotions. Laura added, that Mademoiselle Monti had not been permitted again to cross the threshold at Newton, and it was not known what had become of her.

With my husband I had a full and complete explanation. The note Francesca had seen him read was an old one of my own. He attempted not, by dwelling upon the way in which I had tried him for months and months, to extenuate his own conduct with respect to Lady Tintern. He owned—and bitterly he accused himself for it—that he had sometimes been so exasperated against me, as to have been induced to annoy me intentionally, by showing an undue attention to Augusta, whose great partiality for him might have flattered his self-love a little. But he assured me, with the fondest and most fervent protestations, that never had his heart been faithless to me, for that he had ever loved me, and me alone; and that, on the very evening so fatal to us all, Lady Tintern had utterly disgusted him by venturing to speak slightly and upbraidingly of her husband, and, to excuse herself, had told

him that Mademoiselle Monti was no less convinced than she was of the truth of what she asserted. "Your opinion of both, my dearest Caroline, was quite correct, and I deeply lament now that I did not heed you in time."

I asked him if he had ever heard what Captain Spencer had said to me?

He answered—"No. But he and I sat up at cards after Edward had gone to bed; and, being both excited by wine, followed by brandy, a slight altercation took place on some trifling subject. Our tempers were easily inflamed, and Spencer boasted to me of what you had allowed him to say to you. High words ensued: I accused him of being a liar, and even then, my dearest love, my trust in you was not shaken for an instant. He left me in anger, after he had given me a challenge, and a meeting had been arranged for an early hour the next morning, about five miles hence. He went to find his second, and I wrote and secured Hasted for mine, and he was to have met me at the corner beyond the lodge-gates. I did not leave the house without imploring pardon for all my sins, and for the grievous ones committed against my wife. The rest you know."

"Yes," I answered, sadly; "this precious note told me the rest. Oh, Arthur! what have I to forgive you, compared with what you have to forgive me?"

My patient was completely exhausted by this trying conversation; and we both agreed that we would spend the short remaining time that we were to be together upon earth, without so much as recurring to painful subjects. But Arthur lived some weeks, and might have lingered for a few more, had it not been for the shock of his mother's death. The mournful and unlooked-for intelligence was conveyed in a letter from Mrs. Douglas to her brother. She told him that Mrs. Mildmay had been on the eve of embarking for England when attacked by cholera, which had in four-and-twenty hours deprived them of their only surviving parent. My husband was sensibly affected by the sad news; but he found consolation in the knowledge of how speedily he should follow that beloved mother to her rest.

During this time, I became so ill as to attract the attention of Mr. Welling. I warded off his remonstrances as well as I could; but I began to feel that it was my duty to tell my husband of my approaching death, and ask him what his

wishes were with respect to the future guardianship of his child. That day, Mr. Mordaunt—who had been most kind and attentive throughout our season of affliction—had come to administer the Holy Communion to his dying friend ; and Agnes, Mrs. Mivart, and I, had received it also. All, including our good pastor, had been deeply moved by the solemn and affecting rite—so impressive at all times, but more than ever when one, who must shortly quit this earthly scene, receives it, as He did who instituted it, for the last time here below. When Mr. Mordaunt had departed with his words of blessing, Arthur told me he was feeling quite happy ; and, as he seemed better than usual, I resolved at once to break to him what I had firmly resolved to tell him. At first he would not believe me, but the calm earnestness with which I spoke soon convinced him of the truth ; and he began to reproach himself with his want of observation in not having seen how ill I was, and forced me to have advice, and be more careful. But on this topic I implored him to be silent ; for I assured him that, had they taken me from him, I should not have been alive now.

Presently he asked to see our little Arthur. Our faithful Mrs. Mivart was always at hand in the dressing-room, when not with us, and I sent her for him. The child was placed by the side of his father, who, tenderly embracing him, told him to be good and kind to his mother, and his cousin Agnes. Then, turning to the latter, he took her hand, and said—

“Agnes, should any thing happen to Caroline when I am gone, it is the earnest wish of us both that our child should be under your care, assisted of course by those who are already joined with his mother in his guardianship. Dear Agnes, will you undertake the charge ?”

Agnes could hardly reply—“God forbid I should ever be so called upon, Arthur ! But should it be the will of God that your darling boy should be left an orphan, I will do all in my power to be as a parent to him ; and most deeply I feel this most convincing proof of your esteem and regard.”

With her disengaged hand she took mine as thus she spoke ; and, leaning her head on my shoulder, her tears prevented her saying more. A loud sob from Mrs. Mivart was heard ; and Arthur called her to him, thanked her for all she had done for him, and, bidding her to take comfort, commended me to her watchfulness. Then he threw his

arm around me, and murmuring a few sounds of love in my ear, he kissed me fondly; for he saw how I was struggling with the violence of my emotions. But gradually—so gradually, that I scarcely remarked it—that arm relaxed its hold, and sank upon the bed. For the space of perhaps two or three minutes, a complete silence followed Arthur's last words; for we were all engrossed by our own sad reflections. A faint cry from the child first recalled us to ourselves. The rapid change in his father's countenance had struck even his youthful apprehension. Arthur's eyes were closed—the warm breath of life had departed from him—and the arm which, but a few moments since, had so fondly encircled me, had drooped, to be raised no more.

My husband was dead!

CHAPTER XXX.

IT is now three months ago. The spring is an unusually early one ; and as, with a daily increasing sense of weakness, I am laid on my sofa by the open window, the balmy freshness of the air, and the sweet sights and sounds of that hopeful season, convey to me the sole remaining feeling of pleasure of which I am yet capable. Hitherto my bodily sufferings have not been very great—perhaps in mercy to the torments of my mind ; but at times I am oppressed by want of breath, and my cough is painful. I am pronounced to be past recovery ; and, were it not for my beloved child, I should indeed bless God for the prospect of a speedy release. But I know that my little Arthur will have the best of friends and instructors in Agnes, the unselfish Agnes—how unselfish, I was never fully aware till the morning succeeding to my husband's death. I had feared that Mr. Welling, who had already taken me professionally in hand, would have forbidden my agitating myself by viewing the corpse of Arthur ; so I left my sleepless bed at an early hour, and, wrapt in a dressing-gown, I crept softly to the door of the room in which he was laid. I was surprised to find it partly open ; and still more so on entering, to behold Agnes kneeling by the coffin, her hands clasped as in prayer, and her whole frame quivering with the emotion she could not suppress. While he was yet alive, she had prayed and striven day by day to banish all remembrance of that past which had been to her as a transient glimpse of paradise, and to think of him only as the husband of another, and as a kind protector and friend to herself ; but then—when the bonds of all earthly relationship had been dissolved by death, and the spirit had passed away to that land where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage—then, for the

first and last time, those feelings of deep and strong affection rushed back upon her, and overwhelmed her in their flowing tide. I returned unperceived to my room; and she has never known that I was the involuntary witness of her anguish in that bitter hour.

From her and Mr. Mordaunt I have derived my chief sources of comfort; for they have taught me that, sinner as I am, there is yet hope for me in the mercy of the All-Merciful.

I do not rise now till after breakfast, and am supported into the boudoir adjoining my room, and spend several hours on a sofa there. This morning Agnes brought me a letter; and I saw at once by her face that she had received some disagreeable intelligence, and was hesitating as to how she could best impart it to me.

"You have heard some strange news, Agnes," said I. "You need not be afraid of telling me; nothing can distress me much now."

"My news is from Lady Laura," she returned, "and she writes from Newton, whither she had been hastily summoned. You will hardly believe it, Caroline; but Lady Tintern has left her home!"

"I am little surprised at that," I answered, with a coolness which my cousin seemed to think unfeeling. I added—"For *his* sake I grieve, but he had already been partially undeceived. With whom has she gone off?"

"With Sir Godfrey Tracy, it is believed. Laura says, he was an admirer of her's years ago, and that after his marriage she made his wife very miserable, by flirting with him in so silly a manner, to say the least of it."

"Lady Tracy's communication is now accounted for," I observed.

"Yes," replied Agnes. "Here is Laura's letter, if you like to see it, Caroline."

It represented Lady Tintern's extreme disgust at the strict surveillance which her husband had exercised over her, after the *denouement* at Vernon Hall. It had astonished her to find how he, who was by nature so gentle, could become so stern. This, it was supposed, had induced her to elope. Laura wrote:—

"It is sad to watch my brother, so utterly cast down and heart-broken. His only pleasure is in the society of his

little girl, whose doating affection for him increases daily. She will sit for hours (you know she was always a still, delicate child) on the arm of his chair, with her hand on his shoulder, looking scarcely less pale and melancholy than himself. The doctors have ordered him abroad again ; and he says, if the child and I can go too, he will do as they advise. Augusta has never once asked for her mother, but who can wonder ?

"There is one resolution which Edward has formed, and for which no doubt he will be blamed and derided, even by some whose good opinion he would most value. You are aware how strongly he has ever held in detestation the practice of duelling, and he has no intention now of being false to his principle, by challenging Sir G. Tracy. I offer no comment—I merely state the fact, and will only add that I believe none who have known my brother could for an instant suspect his personal courage.

"You, my dear Agnes, will feel for us in our affliction, and so will dear Caroline, of whose illness I grieve to hear," &c., &c.

Nearly another month has elapsed since I wrote any of my manuscript ; indeed, that uneventful time has afforded nought to relate. I grow perceptibly weaker, and suffer more.

To-day Agnes has received from Lady Laura the following letter:—

"PARIS, May —, 18—.

"MY DEAR AGNES—It is the greatest comfort to me that in you I have a friend to whom I may open my heart, and whose interest in me is unfailing. But my time is short, and I will indulge in no further preamble, beyond assuring you how sad your account of Caroline has made me. Give her my affectionate love—she says I must not hope for her to live.

"This morning I went to one of those large houses which you have never seen, but have often heard described. I mean an abode of a size and number of stories, which admit of the greatest luxury and grandeur and the most abject poverty beneath the same roof—each barely conscious of the existence of the other. My object was to see a little *conturière*, who has been working for me, and struggling hard, for the sake of a blind father dependent on her, to keep up,

notwithstanding the approach of severe illness, which has thrown her down at last. I had to ascend an innumerable number of staircases before I arrived at the *étage* on which is her small room ; and, while talking to her, my attention was occasionally drawn to a sound, as of impatient complaint, distinctly audible through the thin partition which separated us from the adjoining apartment.

“ ‘ Ah ! Madame,’ said my *protégée*, answering my inquiring look ; is it not terrible to hear ? The lady has been there for some days past : she is dreadfully ill, and scarcely any one comes to see her, and during that time I have been unable to leave my bed. I caught a glimpse of her once through the open door, *et elle était belle comme un ange !* ’

“ My curiosity was excited, I confess ; and I hope a desire to serve the unfortunate creature was not wanting. So, desiring my maid to await my return, I stepped to the door, and tapped gently. The voice which said ‘ *Entrez*, ’ struck a cold chill on my heart, but I did not associate it with any particular remembrance, and my consternation was unbounded when, on that poor and miserable pallet, I beheld Augusta Tintern ! She was extremely ill—that was evident—but more I could not surmise. She started when she saw me.

“ ‘ Is it really you, Laura ? Well ! this is more than I expected.’

“ ‘ Stop ! ’ I exclaimed ; ‘ this visit is an undesigned one on my part. I was calling on a sick woman in the next room, and your murmurings, with the account she gave me of the desolate state of her neighbour, induced me to come and ask if I could render any assistance. Augusta ! I hardly know if I ought to be with you, and yet I cannot bear to leave you without offering my help, for you seem very ill and miserable—and I glanced round upon the shabby, scanty furniture, and the mean appearance of the tiny apartment.’

“ ‘ Ill and miserable ! ’ she repeated ; ‘ no wonder ! But I may as well tell you all, for I should have been forced to appeal to Edward’s compassion soon. You must know, Laura, that Sir Godfrey Tracy is neither more nor less than a ruined gamester, as he told me when he took his leave of me ten days ago. I had intrusted him with all the jewels and money I possessed ; and what did the wretch do but

part with them to discharge an enormous debt, for which he was on the point of being arrested, and then came and upbraided me with having no more to give him ! I abused him as he deserved, and he flung out of the room in a rage, and I have not seen him again, and only hope he is in prison by this time. Soon after the hotel-keeper, who I suppose had some suspicion, demanded an interview, and requested me to pay the fortnight's bill. I told him it was not convenient at that moment ; and he was most uncivil, and insisted on my going. So I had to leave my handsome, comfortable apartments, and could find no one to trust me (for the tale soon got abroad) but the owner of this wretched place, where, as I might have expected, I have been exceedingly unwell with the epidemic now raging in Paris. I have literally but two or three francs in my possession. However, Laura, I know you are much too good to have any pity for me ; still, I hope you and your's will not allow me to die in this dog-hole, for want of a doctor and proper food. I had not a servant that would stay with me when the truth came out ; and, if it had not been for a woman in a room on this *étage*, who occasionally sees after me, I should have been entirely neglected. It is only to-day that I feel strong enough to write.—But, Laura, how came you here ?'

" 'My brother and niece are on their way to Italy,' I answered, 'and I am accompanying them. Edward's health is sadly delicate, and I know not how he will bear the shock of hearing that I have seen you, Augusta !'

"I thought she did wince a little at this ; but she only said—'How is the child ?' and went on—'One thing I had nearly forgotten to tell you, Laura ; and that is, that I have had a visit from that fiend who has ruined and betrayed me. She—you know I mean Francesca Monti—came three days ago, and taunted me with my fallen condition ; observing that I had acted unwisely in quarrelling with her, and attempting to cast her off, which, as you are aware, I did during our visit at Vernon Hall, Laura ; for she became so troublesome and exacting that I could put up with her no longer, though I own I was very much afraid of breaking with her. But I never thought she would dare to say a word, hoping that I should take her back into favour. Wretch that she is ! she heaped all sorts of abuse upon me, and told me that I should never see her again, for she could

not afford to risk her character by visiting people like me; but she had come that once to witness and triumph in my downfall! Oh, Laura! if I could have reached that knife, I will not answer for'——

"‘Hush!’ I interrupted; ‘I am not here to listen to such unavailing tales of guilt and misery. But, Augusta, I would not leave my worst foe in the sad condition in which I have so unexpectedly found you, without an effort to assist. Here is my purse—it contains enough for your present use—and I will provide you with a nurse, and see that a medical man visits you. I shall consider it my duty, however painful, to inform my brother of your situation; and what he feels to be right, that I am sure he will do, even towards you. And now, have you any thing further that you wish to say to me?’

"‘Nothing,’ she returned, with a carelessness which shocked me more than I can express; ‘but thank you, Laura, for what you have given and promised me; and I do trust you will not fail to put in a good word for me to your brother, for you know your influence over him.’

"I was too thoroughly disgusted to have any wish to continue such a conversation; yet I was unwilling to leave her without one word of advice to try and lead her thoughts to repentance for her grievous sins. ‘Augusta!’ I began, ‘though we are now and henceforth as strangers to each other, yet still, as a fellow-creature, let me implore you’——

"‘It is all in vain, Laura; I know what you would say,’ she interrupted. ‘But I have nought in common with such things, and never had, and I am too old now to reform.’

"‘Then, may God have mercy upon you!’ I exclaimed; ‘for vain is the help of man.’

"She held out her hand—what could I do? I took it for an instant, and was gone.

"I have no heart to dwell on my subsequent interview with Edward, dear Agnes. You know him not as I do; but still perhaps well enough to imagine his feelings on hearing that the wife, whom he had loved with all the deep devotion of his nature, was so near him, and reduced to so pitiable a state of poverty. I told him what immediate arrangements I had made for her, and he approved of them, and thanked and kissed me; while his hand, and even his whole frame, trembled, and he was obliged to leave his chair,

and walk hurriedly up and down. He has resolved upon allowing Augusta £800 a-year, while she goes on steadily and quietly. This is his revenge—is it not worthy of him?

“I cannot write upon indifferent subjects, dear Agnes. A similar letter I am despatching to my poor father and mother. Give my best love to little Arthur; and, believe me, your most affectionate,

“LAURA TINTERN.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER month is past, and I am rejoiced to turn from my last sad entry to a bright picture of happiness, which it has gladdened my very heart to behold, and I thank God that I have lived to see it.

About twelve o'clock, as I was lying on my sofa with little Arthur at my feet, Mrs. Mivart brought me a message from a young person, who, she said, was most anxious to see me.

"Who is it, Mrs. Mivart?" I asked, smiling at the mysterious manner she had assumed.

"It is that Italian young lady, madam, to whom"—

"You don't mean to say that it is Mademoiselle Salvi?" I exclaimed.

"It is indeed, madam ; but, if you excite yourself so much, I must take upon me, in Miss Bray's absence, to forbid your seeing her."

"Oh no, dear Mrs. Mivart!" I said, quite imploringly; "you will not grudge me so great a pleasure, I am sure."

So the old woman departed to summon my *protégée*, who entered, her face beaming with delight ; but when she saw me extended on my invalid couch, and observed the ravages which disease had already wrought in me, her countenance changed, and she burst into tears. I made her sit down by me, and bade her not to grieve for me ; for my sorrows were drawing to a close, and I was about to follow my husband.

"And leave this darling child," said Maria, as she looked at Arthur, who had crept, wondering, to her knee ; and she lifted him in her arms, and kissed him repeatedly.

"My child has one who will be more than his mother to him," I remarked. "But now, Mademoiselle Salvi"—assuming a more cheerful tone—"I am all impatience to hear your adventures since last we parted. Has any thing

more conclusive been ascertained as to the fate of the Marchesa Monti?"

"She is alive—sound in body as in mind—and she and her husband and child have been visiting Mrs. Protheroe at Bath, and are now at the inn at Leyton, where they have come in the hope that you might be induced to see them, and receive from their own lips their grateful thanks for the kind protection you would fain have extended to Francisco and myself when we were strangers in a foreign land. Blessed be God!" she added, crossing herself devoutly.

I paused—could I encounter the meeting? I had of course only admitted the most intimate friends since the death of my husband; but I remembered how, towards the last, he had expressed the most vivid interest in the fate of Maria and her little charge, declaring that he believed every word she had ever uttered against Francesca, and deeply regretted that he had formerly had some doubt as to the entire authenticity of the tale I had repeated to him. So I said, I would see them;—"but first, Maria, tell me how all these blessed changes have come about."

The substance of the history was as follows:—

It appeared that, before Mr. Deloraine's visit to the continent, at the time of his writing to me in London, his suspicions had been somewhat raised by a circumstance trifling in itself, but which, joined to the great dislike he had conceived for Francesca, had not been without its effect upon his mind. He had gone to call upon Monsieur Monti, who, it may be remembered, was then in London with his son and his sister—and, being ushered into the drawing-room, he had there found Mademoiselle Monti in conversation with her maid Françoise. The latter was going out at the door as Mr. Deloraine entered; and, evidently ruffled, said spitefully—

"Ah! Mademoiselle, we must hope that Maria Salvi will never turn up again. How fond she seemed to be of the Marchesa, to be sure!"

"*Va t'en*, Françoise!" was her mistress's hasty reply.

Mademoiselle Monti was all smiles by the time Mr. Deloraine had advanced to shake hands with her—indeed, as we have seen, it was her cue to be most particularly bland and insinuating towards those whom she most disliked and feared. Mr. Deloraine was one of the number, and his first

observation did not tend to increase her friendship for him. With his eye steadily fixed upon her, he said—

“Good-morning, Mademoiselle Monti. My memory is not a very excellent one in such matters, certainly; but I thought that girl’s name had been Adèle. Surely she was so called when I saw her in your service at Florence, and you dwelt so much on her exertions in aiding you in your search after the Marchesa Monti?”

Francesca returned some evasive answer, but Mr. Deloraine was not satisfied; and, after vainly endeavouring to ascertain through me where Maria was to be found, he determined to revisit Italy, in the hope, however vague, of clearing up this mystery. His time was at his own disposal; travelling was his delight, and he was quite glad to have an object in view. His researches, as we have seen, were prematurely terminated by his sudden recall to England on family business. While in his own country he had heard, through Captain Spencer, of the great intimacy that had sprung up between Lady Tintern and Mademoiselle Monti, and of the husband’s dislike to his wife’s friend. Mr. Deloraine was pleased to have his opinion of the young lady corroborated by that of a man whom he respected as he did Lord Tintern; and finding that the Marchese stayed on in England, which reminded him of his days of happiness, and shrank from returning to his native land, where he had known such bitter sorrow, he resolved, three months ago, that he would make one last effort to discover the truth, and for that purpose he departed once more for Florence.

This time he was more successful. The very day after his arrival, as he was strolling leisurely in the sunshine close to the hotel, he encountered one whom, even through the disguise of her inferior attire, he immediately recognized as the long lost Marchesa Monti. The recognition was mutual, as a low cry from her testified; but she was walking on in a hurried nervous manner, as if uncertain what she should do, when a strong though friendly hand was laid upon her arm, and Mr. Deloraine exclaimed—

“You are not going to disown me, Madame Monti!”

The poor creature turned her sad, worn face up to his—oh! what a contrast was she to the Lucy Protheroe he had first seen on the hills near Hastings, and to the lovely Marchesa of after times at Florence; and, leaning for support against

a neighbouring post, she seemed ready to faint. But tears came to her relief; and Mr. Deloraine, calling a coach, put her into it, and asking her where her present home was situated, directed the man to drive them thither. The distance was very short, for Mademoiselle Salvi was now living in a less remote quarter of the city; and for the last week Lucy had been with her faithful attendant. Mr. Deloraine said little to her as they drove along, wishing her fully to recover herself; and it was not until they were quietly seated in Maria's abode, that he asked for a sketch of her history.

It may be told in a few words.

After Maria, at her own earnest request, and for the sake of the child, had left her apparently near her last hour at Leghorn, Lucy had been speedily joined by Mademoiselle Monti. The presence of her sister-in-law was perhaps more likely to prove fatal to her than any other imaginable evil, except the failure of Maria's attempt to escape with Francisco; but though neither Mademoiselle Monti, nor Lucy herself, was aware of it, the crisis of her malady was already past; and when Monsieur Bertot paid his evening visit, he at once pronounced his patient to be on the road towards recovery. He has been before described as a man whose chief or only object in life was his own worldly advancement; though he steadily avoided taking any notice of the hints which Francesca threw out from time to time of her desire to hasten her sister's end, yet he was not sufficiently scrupulous to prevent his accepting a large bribe to hold his tongue about her, or rather to corroborate the story of her death having actually occurred. All that neglect and unkindness could effect was resolutely tried both by mistress and maid, but without success. The spring of hope had been revived in Lucy's breast, and was not to be dried up again so quickly; for she thought of her child's safety, and believed that the hour of her restoration to her husband's love was not far distant.

Judge, then, of her surprise and horror, when one evening, as she was lying by the yet open window, Mademoiselle Monti and Adèle entered her apartment, both muffled, and with thick veils over their faces, and followed by two men in masks. The dreadful thought came across poor Lucy that insanity was returning upon her, for she knew that she was

awake ; but she was speedily undeceived. Deigning no syllable of explanation, the two women began to cover her in a cloak, a large bonnet, and a veil yet more opaque than their own ; and the sole answer they gave to her earnest inquiries was a peremptory command to be silent. They forced her into a coach, which was waiting at the inn door ; and, favoured by the rapidly increasing darkness, they drove off. During the few minutes that elapsed in their way to the water-side, it occurred to Lucy that all this was in some manner connected with a funeral which she had seen leave the house the day before. She had questioned Adèle as to who it was that was being borne to the grave, but had received the impertinent reply, that she neither knew nor cared. It was, in fact, a sham funeral, plotted by Francesca, and connived at by Monsieur Bertot, the coffin containing only a wooden figure. Though quietly, it was handsomely done ; for Mademoiselle Monti knew that her purse would not be the emptier for it.

Arrived at the place of embarkation, Lucy was hurried into a steam-packet bound for Marseilles. Here one of the men left them, while the other accompanied the two ladies and the maids, and was designed to act the part of a courier. Lucy never once saw her sister-in-law during the voyage—probably the latter shrank from looking upon the being she was treating so cruelly ; but in the cabin, Adèle brought her what she actually required, and waited upon her so far as not to excite observation by her neglect. The unhappy Marchesa, still so weak and delicate, was now completely prostrate ; and her voice was barely strong enough to enable her to ask a few questions of Adèle, who remained obstinately silent. The winds were favourable, and their passage was a swift one. When they reached Marseilles, a *fiacre* was quickly found, into which Lucy was lifted, followed by Francesca and her maid, while their male attendant rode outside. Avoiding the more crowded thoroughfares of the busy, populous place, they drove through narrow streets and lanes till they stopped at the door of a large, detached building on the outskirts of the town. A high brick wall ran all round it, which, with the gloomy court-yard, invested it in Lucy's eyes with the appearance of a prison. And a prison in truth it was, though not for criminals—it was a madhouse !

Nor was it one in very excellent repute, though it had

been recommended to Francesca by Monsieur Bertot as likely to answer her object. That object was twofold—to drive her sister out of her mind again, and perhaps kill her, by the constant sight and presence of insanity ; and to prevent any tidings of her from ever reaching her husband's ears, by burying her alive and rational in this charnel-house of wretched beings, who were dead indeed to the world. Several were there whose relations or friends, caring little or nought for them, had sent them to an establishment where economy was more considered than the welfare and comfort of its miserable inmates. To the unprincipled and unfeeling head of this asylum, and to his wife, Mademoiselle Monti intrusted the secret—which must so soon have been manifest to all—of Lucy's sanity ; and she promised nearly double the salary usually received by them, if they would keep the lady in strict confinement, and always represent her as a lunatic. These expenses Mademoiselle Monti proposed to meet by her legacy, reserving for a more leisure hour the consideration of how she could blind her brother to the fact of her money disappearing so rapidly and so unaccountably. The outlay, she believed, would be amply repaid her by the success of her schemes. One interview before her departure she had with her hapless victim ; and, in answer to her heart-rending prayers and entreaties for mercy, Francesca taunted her with the failure of her attempt to escape, and told her that she might reckon herself lucky to be let off with her life.

And weeks and months passed by, and Lucy was still a prisoner, fed on coarse and scanty food, sleeping on a hard and narrow bed, and—worse than all—subjected to daily association with those poor senseless creatures, who, resembling her only in being harmless, were with herself turned out to take exercise in the gloomy court-yard, or the scarce less gloomy apology for a garden, where the shrieks and groans of the raving maniacs were distinctly audible. But the discipline of sorrow, by which she had been so long and severely chastened, had wrought an ennobling change in Lucy's character ; and, while she bowed her head in meek submission to her Father in Heaven, she yet despaired not of His mercy on earth, and watched and marked every little occurrence that might possibly be in her favour.

In all houses, the servants are apt more or less to take their tone from their superiors—the domestics of well-bred

people have civil, obliging manners ; while those whose masters and mistresses are disagreeable or upstart, are wont themselves to be churlish or insolent. Such was the case with the attendants here ; but there was one man, employed chiefly in outdoor occupations, whose demeanour was less harsh and rough than that of his colleagues, and Lucy, upon whom this was not lost, occasionally addressed him in the garden, and soon convinced him of her entire sanity. Her great difficulty lay in want of means, but she still had in her possession a very valuable bracelet. It had been one of Fabio's earliest gifts, and it went to her heart to part with it ; but the necessity was urgent. So she took the first opportunity of speaking to this man in private, and asking him whether the precious ornament would induce him to connive at her escape ; adding, that she must trust to his generosity to let her have a small portion of the money to pay her travelling expenses, and maintain her till she could rejoin her friends.

The man consented : he disposed of the bracelet advantageously ; and the Marchesa found herself richer than she expected, when, in the dead of night, he unlocked her door, put the money into her hand, and got her safely through the outer gates while the porter was sleeping soundly. She reached Florence without accident or adventure ; but here her own indiscretion ruined her. For, only the day after, she strolled into the Cascine, fondly recalling and dwelling upon old times ; and there, to her horror, she saw her child walking with his father. She saw them, and she saw Francesca too, and Francesca saw her, though without betraying herself ; but, making some excuse for leaving her brother, she dogged Lucy's steps to her obscure lodging unperceived by the latter. And at midnight the Marchesa was once more forced into a coach, and carried off to her old place of confinement.

In accordance with the instructions contained in Mademoiselle Monti's letter to the principal, he treated their victim with redoubled severity, and she was even debarred from breathing the fresh air of heaven ; though all was nothing compared to her anguish of mind when she thought of Francisco. And in this miserable condition she remained till hope had wellnigh perished within her, when death removed from her her tyrant master. He was succeeded by a man very opposite to himself—straightforward, honest,

and kind-hearted. Lucy had little difficulty in persuading him that one, who was no madwoman, was unjustly confined in his asylum ; but she had more in preventing him from writing to her friends. She assured him that, by so doing, he would ruin her, and that her only chance lay in his setting her at liberty without appealing to any one. He did so, and he did more than this ; for he supplied her with money, bidding her not to let it trouble her should it never be in her power to refund him.

With many thanks and blessings on his head, Lucy made her second exit from these gloomy walls ; and again did she bend her steps towards Florence, not knowing where else to direct them. Maria Salvi, ignorant of where her charge had been taken when he quitted Florence, had remained in the city, and re-established herself in her old quarters, never ceasing to hope for the return of the Montis. A feeling that she might now be there, though before she had failed in discovering her, induced Lucy to repair to the little habitation which had sheltered her and her son in their utmost extremity, and where she once more found a home. For one night she rested there ; and the next day, as we have seen, she met Mr. Deloraine, who removed her agonizing doubts as to the safety of her child.

The three went together to England, where they were not in the least expected ; for Mr. Deloraine, after hearing Lucy's terrible disclosures of Francesca's cruelty towards herself, and the designs she had formerly entertained against her nephew, thought it most prudent not to give notice of their approach. We have before noticed that Made-moiselle Monti herself, hard-hearted and unscrupulous as she was, shrank from the actual commission of murder, so long as there were any other possible means of obtaining her end. And in England, far more than in Italy, she dreaded making the attempt ; and so, believing that she was secure from all further trouble with Lucy, she delayed from week to week, and from month to month, taking any decided steps against the boy's life. At all events, she postponed the final issue of her projects till they should return to Italy, which she fully intended they should do.

But the day of retribution was at hand. It began when she quarrelled with Lady Tintern, who, in a fit of anger, discarded her from her friendship (if such it may be called)

for ever. The Italian went home to her brother's in London; and here a fresh trouble awaited her through the importunity of Adèle, who claimed the fulfilment of the promise her mistress had made her, of a handsome pecuniary reward, saying that it was no fault of her's that the young lady had been baulked of poisoning the child, or that she was afraid of doing so now. It was extremely inconvenient to Francesca to meet these demands, for her purse was already heavily drained for the maintenance of her sister-in-law in her distant prison; and she told Adèle that she must have patience. But Adèle became violent and abusive, and declared that she would wait no longer, and would not hesitate to betray her mistress if her claims were not immediately satisfied. Mademoiselle Monti, terrified by the consciousness of guilt, gave her all she could, and wrote instantly to the late master of the establishment near Marseilles—of whose death she had not yet heard—to beg that he would contrive some means for ridding her altogether of Lucy, promising him a large reward for so doing.

But it was all in vain. Adèle obtained tidings one evening of the arrival of Madame Monti and her companions in London, and of their intention to present themselves the next morning. She fled—but not without posting a letter for her master, in which she acknowledged her own guilt, and betrayed his sister's, referring him to the Marchesa for the corroboration of the substance of her statements.

Mademoiselle Monti was out walking when Mr. Deloraine and his two charges drove to the door at eleven o'clock; and, leaving the ladies in the carriage, he went to prepare his friend for the meeting that awaited him. We need not dwell upon that meeting—how the Marchese clasped to his bosom the beloved wife whom he had so long believed to be dead—nor how Lucy turned from him to embrace her long lost child, who greeted her scarce less joyously than his father. Nor was the good Maria forgotten; she was called in, and received the welcome she had so well deserved. In the midst of their bliss, Adèle's letter arrived, and was delivered to Monsieur Monti. He opened it; and, as his eye glanced over the first few lines, his mind was led back to the atrocious perfidy of his sister, which had been almost forgotten in the excess of his new-born happiness. But he read on without uttering a word, and handed the communi-

cation to his wife. It drove the bright colour from her cheek ; but she attempted not to deny its contents, and her silence confirmed all. And they never saw Francesca again ; for Adèle's flight, and the intelligence of Lucy's return, which she heard from the servants at the door, at once determined her to enter that house no more. She betook herself, as we have seen, to Paris, where her disgrace was not yet known, and where she had formed acquaintances who, she yet hoped, might be useful to her. Only a week ago, an anonymous letter, in an unknown hand, had reached her brother. It told him that Mademoiselle Monti was dead ; that the tidings of her iniquity had been widely circulated among her friends in the city by a servant, who, it was supposed, had been formerly her accomplice ; that this girl had succeeded in establishing in the minds of the family with whom Francesca was residing, a conviction of the truth of her accusations, and that they had immediately discarded the young lady. Nothing further had been heard of her, till it was announced, three days after in the public prints, that a young woman, lodging in the Rue —, had been found dead in her bed the previous morning, and that a servant girl was in custody on suspicion of having murdered her. So it proved ; for Adèle, having received from Mademoiselle Monti a decided refusal to her application for a character, and having no means left to her of procuring a livelihood, had resolved to gratify her revenge, and had, on some pretext or other, gained admittance by night to the chamber of her late mistress, and effected her purpose. She was speedily apprehended ; and, her guilt being certain, it was easy to foresee her doom.

Lucy shuddered, and felt the profoundest compassion, even for Francesca, as she thought of her, thus hastily summoned to appear before the tribunal of her Maker, her head loaded not with imperfections, but with the direst crimes. And when Mademoiselle Monti's letter was returned to her brother from the asylum, showing plainly how those crimes had been in heart perpetrated by her through months and years—still, the one most injured could pity and forgive. After the first frantic outbreak of rage and grief, Monsieur Monti never mentioned his sister's name, nor alluded to it in the most distant manner.

This is the tale which has so deeply interested me, and in

which I hope I have interested my readers also in some slight degree.

That afternoon they came—Lucy, and her husband, and their beautiful boy, all radiant with happiness ; but the two former bearing traces, not to be mistaken, of the heavy trials and sufferings through which they had passed. In a moment, I recognized in the Marchesa the pretty engaging girl whom Arthur and I had observed in tears under the tree in the Cascine. I told her so, and she said that must have been on the occasion of her first escape from Marseilles. Agnes now appeared, leading my Arthur, and followed by Maria. While the children were making friends, and Monsieur Monti was conversing with my cousin, Lucy bent her head to my ear, and a bright blush mantled her lovely face, as she whispered softly—

“ You know Mr. Willis, and his early history ? He told me so. He brought his dear wife to see us this morning ; and, thank God ! I have lived to hear him say that no mortal man can be happier than himself. And my husband thoroughly understands him now.”

I pressed her hand, but my feeble powers were becoming wearied ; and, perceiving this, they rose to depart, after thanking me again most earnestly for the very little I had done for their boy and Maria. The brightness of their joy was only dimmed for the time by the fear of never seeing me again—but, oh ! what real pleasure has that one sight of them afforded me.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER week gone by—and this day's entry, I feel, will be the last in my journal. The events of these few hours can hardly fail to accelerate my passage to the grave.

First, Agnes came as usual, about one o'clock, bringing me some hothouse strawberries. The traces of tears were on her sad, sweet countenance; and for once, mistaking their cause, I drew her to me, and told her that she must not weep for one whose approaching end was no source of distress to herself.

"It was not that—at least, not that only; but Henry Mor-daunt wished me to tell you, dear Caroline, what has passed between us this morning. He came and asked to see me. He told me, that he could not bear to contemplate the desolate position in which I must so soon be placed—that his love for me was unchanged and unchangeable—and that he was convinced you would die happier, if you could know that I had promised to be his wife."

"Dear Henry!" I exclaimed, warmly; "most truly you have judged me! Agnes, I think he is *almost* worthy of you. God bless you both!"

"Stop, dear Caroline! I thought you would guess my answer, and spare me the pain of telling you that I was obliged to refuse him. In justice to himself—in common gratitude for his untiring affection—how could I do otherwise? How could I tell him I loved him, as I know that I *can* love, when I never could entertain for him any warmer feeling than the truest friendship?"

This was the only allusion Agnes had ever made to her early attachment to Arthur, and I was inexpressibly affected by it. She was the first to recover herself—"I can never be entirely alone in the world while your darling boy lives.

You have confided him to me, and he will be my first earthly object. And Henry Mordaunt, I firmly hope and believe, will yet enjoy all the happiness that is to be found in a well-assorted marriage. None can deserve it better, and his wife will be one of the most fortunate of women."

After a few minutes spent in such talk, my cousin said, she feared she had agitated me by her communication, and would leave me to rest. I acceded, first making her promise that she would go to her room and lie down, for she was completely overcome. She went—how little I dreamed of what still awaited me that day before we met again!

I had fallen into a doze, and was dreaming that Arthur was once more with me, and that we were wandering happily together through some beautiful scene—when I was roused from my blissful visions by a low tap at the door. I started, but, collecting myself, I said drowsily, "Come in!" supposing it to be Mrs. Mivart, or my own maid. A moment more, and Captain Spencer stood by my side. I did not ring the bell, nor shrink, nor ask him indignantly how he dared thus to thrust his unwelcome presence upon my widowed solitude—upon my dying hours. I neither spoke nor moved; for the horror inspired by this sudden apparition seemed to deprive me of the power of speech and motion. Seeing that I made no show of resistance, he proceeded to take a chair, and seat himself by my sofa. He broke the silence by saying—

"You have no word of greeting for me, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon! Surely the devotion of years might claim one kind glance—one soft expression—now? I have no living rival; dearest, best-beloved, Caroline, refuse me not this boon, so trifling to you to bestow, but all in all to me to receive!"

And, with the air and manner of an accepted suitor, he attempted to take my hand and carry it to his lips; while his eyes flashed with that passionate love which had illumined them on the day he had first sought to win me. He appeared to divine what was in my thoughts; for, before I had had time to do more than hastily withdraw my hand (I was unable to rise without assistance), he added, fiercely—

"Yes, this is the moment of my revenge—this is the fulfilment of my words! Did not I warn you, Caroline, when once before you flung my love so carelessly away, that

the remembrance of that scene should be with you through life, and haunt your dying hour? *You* have contributed to the realization of the first part of my prophecy—the last, it seems, is to be performed by me alone!”

“Captain Spencer!” I exclaimed, while I trembled from head to foot with emotion, and the knowledge of my entire helplessness—“Captain Spencer! if you have one spark of honour or gentlemanly feeling remaining, you will leave me instantly. Don’t you see that I am dying, and unable to stir from this spot? Is this the proof of your so-called affection? And have you no sense of what is due to the memory of him whom you were wont to term your dearest friend?”

I paused for breath, and he replied—

“Death cancels all such obligations. If I did not respect them enough before, I can hardly be called upon to let them stand now between me and the object of my love. Caroline! Caroline! you will yet live to bless me!”

Here, perceiving the indignant expression of my face, as I struggled for words to defy him, he changed his tone to one of bitter mockery—

“Reject me, then, if you choose—scorn me to the last! You talk of Arthur Mildmay; have you forgotten that you sought his love—not he, yours? Nay, more—that you stooped to tear it from another, and broke her heart by your success! while my first, my whole affection, was freely offered to you, and you treated it as the merest plaything, and flung it from you. And, when you had married the man of your choice, did you not torment his life out of him by your jealousy, and cause his death at last by your encouragement of me? And now you would talk to me of the memory of your undying love—of your widowed heart being buried in his grave, forsooth!”

“Spare me—spare me!” I cried in my agony, as I hid my burning face in my hands, for his shafts were piercing me to the core; “for pity’s sake, spare me!”

“I have no pity,” he returned, “for one who has never shown any for me. I have no pity for her who slighted me when her love would have blest me for life, and made me a different man from the accursed wretch I am. And, even now, not one word of acknowledgment or sympathy with the untired affection of years, which has never wandered from the first sole object of its devotion! Caroline! once more I

kneel before you—turn not away—let me, if but for a moment, press that hand to my heart !”

“ Coward and villain !” I said, passionately ; “ I command you to depart. I have no words to express the horror—the loathing—with which you inspire me ! I never liked you even as a friend ; and now I hate you as my deadliest foe !”

He rose when I had finished, and, folding his arms, he stood before me, and spoke in tones of assumed calmness—

“ You have given me my answer, Mrs. Mildmay Vernon, and you have conquered at last. You tell me that you hate me, but your hatred can hardly rival mine. From my soul I curse you, and fervently trust that the torments of your death-bed may equal the hell you have kindled in my bosom !”

These were his parting words ; and with cheek as white as marble, teeth set, and eyes gleaming with all the deadly passions he had just poured forth, he left me.

He was no sooner gone than I would have given all I had to give, and far more, to recall the evil expressions into which my rage and horror had betrayed me. Were they the expressions of one on the point of death ? How could I hope for the mercy of God, when thus I could feel and speak to a fellow-creature, however guilty ? But Agnes came, and did her best to soothe my fearful agitation ; she brought my child, and sent for Mr. Mordaunt.

And now they have all three left me ; and once more I am, comparatively, at peace. Oh God ! I deserved this last, this bitter punishment ; I deserved that all my sins should be held up before me in their most frightful shape—in their most glaring colours !

But it is over ; and I am at rest.

Yet, while I write, a mist floats before my eyes—a dimness overspreads my mind—my hand refuses to guide my pen—surely, this must be death. Arthur, my best beloved !—and my father !—I come, I come !

(The remainder of the manuscript is finished by another hand.)

Mrs. Mildmay Vernon breathed her last not many hours after she had written the above words. She died peacefully

in the arms of her cousin, and in the presence of her son and her faithful Mrs. Mivart.

Agnes remained firm in her resolution of not marrying, and was in all respects as a mother to Arthur, who was ever to her as the most affectionate and dutiful son. Her friendship with Lady Laura continued unimpaired, and was a source of great happiness to both.

Lady Laura resided chiefly with her brother and his little girl until she married Mr. Deloraine.

Lord Tintern had still an object in his daughter, who lived to bless him, and in part to compensate to him for the heavy afflictions of his early life.

There were rumours afloat, some years after her flight, of the strong likeness, remarked by some English at Naples, between a handsome actress there and the beautiful Augusta Sutherland. And, later still, there were those who declared that Lady Tintern had become a Roman Catholic, and had entered a nunnery; that she was the most rigid of all her companions there, living in self-imposed cold and hunger, and sleeping always in a coffin.

The Montis returned to Italy, where they spent many happy years. Sorrow had not passed over his head without its effect upon his character, for he had lost his early selfishness; and, removed from the evil influence of his sister, he became a very amiable man.

Mrs. Arden, now transformed into Mrs. Smythe, was one of those who hailed most gladly the restoration of the Marchesa to her friends; and Lucy took care that the poor idiot boy, and the generous girl who had succoured her, should not go unrewarded. Monsieur and Madame Monti had two daughters and a son, who became almost as dear to Maria Salvi as their brother had ever been.

Mr. and Mrs. Willis were no less happy, though without a family: and, at the death of Mr. Mordaunt, Henry succeeded to his father's living. His sister Emma's home was with him, for he never married.

Captain Spencer continued to lead a wild reckless life, which was early terminated by a duel in Holland.

Mr. and Mrs. Norman Bankes jogged on contentedly together, each indulging his or her own tastes and inclinations, without annoying or incommoding each other.

Poor Miss Bateman, after waiting till she was nearly

thirty, in the vain hope of entrapping a lord, or a "cavalry officer" at the very least, ended by marrying a plain Mr. Taylor, who was as silly and empty-headed as herself.

So ends our tale: a melancholy one, it must be owned—whether possessed of any interest for the reader, must be left for him or her to determine.

THE END.



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